

# FIRST FROM THE FRONT

BY  
HAROLD ASHTON  
WAR CORRESPONDENT OF  
*The Daily News*












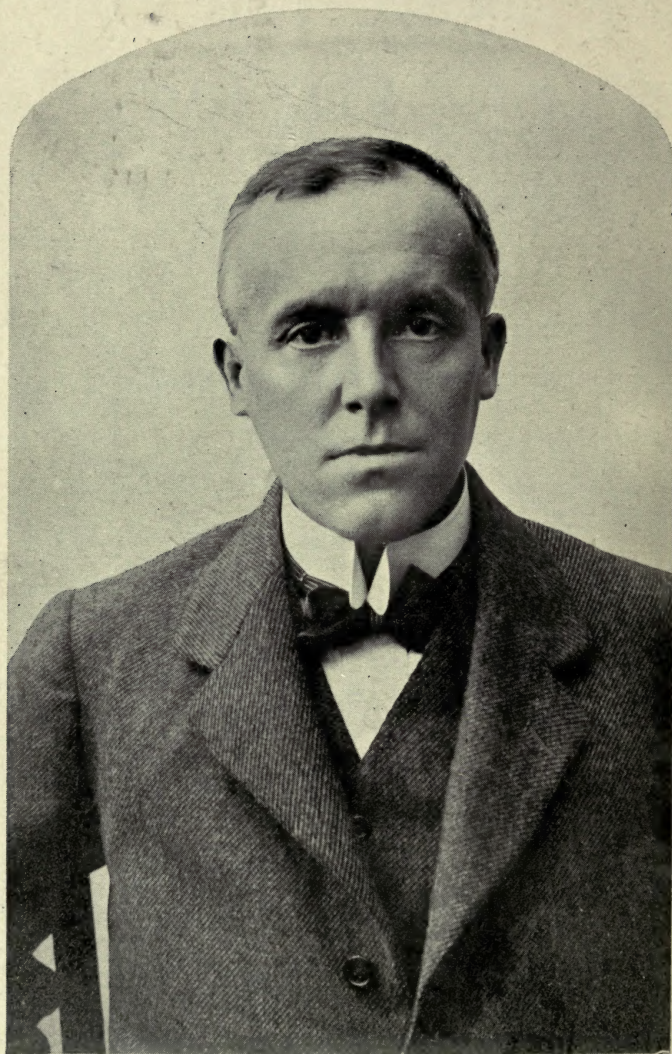
FIRST FROM  
THE FRONT







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*Photo]*

*Frontispiece*

MR. HAROLD ASHTON

*[Sport and General*



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23/3/15

LONDON

C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD.

HENRIETTA STREET, W.C.

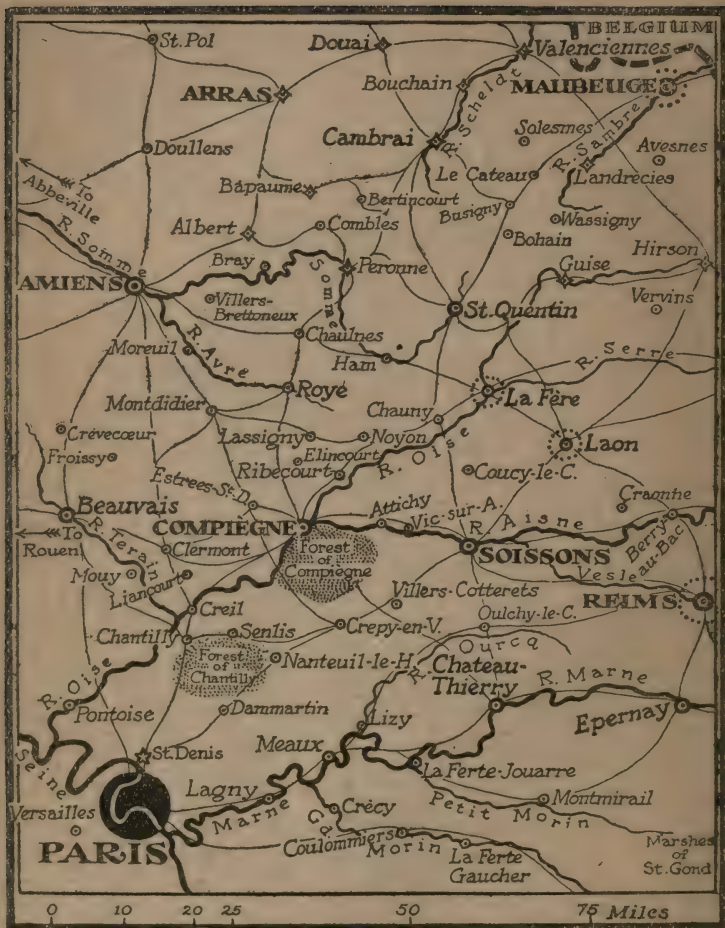


PRINTED AT  
THE BALLANTYNE PRESS  
LONDON



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SKETCH MAP ENABLING THE READER TO FOLLOW THE  
AUTHOR'S MOVEMENTS



## INTRODUCTION

IN this brief book I have lifted a very small corner of the curtain of war, to tell of my adventures—a week in the North Sea, and a breathless score of days in Northern France. I have touched upon both Tragedy and Comedy as they came my way. The tragedy is terrible enough: I have put it down plainly and unvarnished. From Tragedy to Comedy it is but a step; along the gloomiest corridor of life one sees the flash of the cap and hears the rattle of the bells. Otherwise, it would be unbearable. And if my little bell would seem to jangle out of tune, I cannot help it. The bell was there; now and again it rang, and some of us smiled at the music of it.

H. A.

LONDON

*Autumn 1914*





## CHAPTER I

### LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

*War is declared! Smashing battle expected any minute in the North Sea. That's your job. Good luck and good hunting!*

I AM dreaming over Walter Pater's exquisite cameo of "Denys L'Auxerrois" when the telegram comes, whisking me off to the world of war. No more dreams! A rush and a scramble to catch the Flying Scotsman—no time for the elaborate kit of the war correspondent of fiction—a jumble of soldiers scrambling, like me, into the train; everything excitement, everybody eager;—the train settling speedily down to grim business, presently roaring northward through the dreamy, sunny water-meadows of the green Midlands, halting impatiently at York and Doncaster and Newcastle to pick up more soldiers, who tumble into the train buttoning up their new tunics, wrestling with their bright brown leather straps—all keen, avid . . . the blood races with the racing train. My pulses are jumping as we hum along. The great game is beginning; adventure is afoot. Even now,

as we cross the border, swinging by brown, jagged old castles, with the scars of ancient battles still showing upon rampart and turret, the first clang of the tocsin may be ringing across the plateau of the North Sea, and the German War Lord flinging his grim battle line of fighting ships across and across to our anxious coast line.

The talk in the train is all war talk; the mildest passenger with his rug round his knees and his gold pince-nez trembling on his nose, thumps his tea basket and argues passionately on tactics, strategy, gun-calibre, submarines, torpedoes, admirals. . . . Butterflies were his hobby until an hour or so ago. And now, as we swing into the North British station at Edinburgh, dragon-flies—even dragons—would not satisfy him. He has caught the fever, like all of us.

In Edinburgh—most glorious of cities to me—the battle-picture spreads out alluringly. Princes Street in the bright evening shine is alive with soldiery and ringing with cheers as the Highland regiments march by, their kilted knees rising and falling rhythmically to the magic music of the pipes.

A long, slim racing car awaits me at the station; it flashes me in next to no time to Rosyth, the naval base, and I am among my old comrades of the Navy once again. What a



race it has been from London Town! A few hours ago, dreaming with dear, delightful Denys in a sunny garden in Maida Vale; and now, the Forth Bridge towering its majestic heights overhead: its traffic held up, and khaki sentinels marching slowly with drawn bayonets along the fourfoot way—tiny little men, with bayonets no bigger than needles, at that great height: Liliputians of war! And under the bridge, and away, steering for the open sea (that sea which means so much to us now)—line after line of destroyers leaving rolling thunderstorms of black smoke behind them. So the evening closes in, mysteriously, and as night comes up, her black curtain pierced with countless millions of stars, we strain our eyes seaward and hear, or fancy we hear, the dull, distant thud of guns. The sober truth is that we are all dancing on wires. There is a loose-latched door at the inn of the Two Fighting Cocks in Queensferry Town, and at every bang of it we jump. . . .

Many days passed in this manner: days of rumour, and nights of rumour—particularly nights. A handy carpenter mended the slamming door of the Two Fighting Cocks, and I awoke one bright morning to find that the fleet had vanished. The Forth was clear of fighting ships—clear absolutely; and fishing boats coming in from the North Sea reported

from that area, too, a significant emptiness. They had sailed long and far, these dour fisher-folk, looking for the fleet: they had not even been able to spy a smudge of smoke on the horizon. Strange! Several of these boats had not returned. Stranger still; for there was neither fog nor tempest in the North Sea just now, but placid days, starry, clear nights, and an ocean calm enough to make a hammock for the Halcyon-bird to dream and rock in.

One lovely afternoon I motored out to North Berwick, and talked with a group of the trawler-men there.

“Any news of your fellows?” I asked.

“No!” said they, with a gloomy shake of the head.

“And what does it mean?”

“Mines, sir; and nae a doot about it! The cross-sea cargo boats have been warned; the mine-sweepers are out. We’ve spied them. . . .”

More days of restless waiting for something to happen. Never a word, never a whisper, from Jellicoe with his great ships and his great-hearted men away out there in the gathering mists. All wireless dismantled; a seaplane soaring significantly hither and thither over the fretting Forth; but seaplanes, like seagulls, do not tell tales.

Already the greatest war of all time was flaming and thudding in Belgium—in France; when, oh when, would the guns clamour at



sea? What was happening out there over toward the grim grey rock of Heligoland?

There was just a chance of getting across: one, and then another ship had crept in from Scandinavian ports; a certain line was supposed to be clear; and I had met a rare, tremendous viking of a skipper down in an alley-way behind Leith Docks—a sailor to warm the heart of any man. Over tall, slim, glasses of stinging schnapps (I can taste the blazing liquor still) we bargained for the trip in the little cargo steamer which had just come into port mysteriously, secretly, packed with bacon from one of the small corners of Northern Europe unbothered—for the time anyway—by the fierce troubles of war. The *Silver Star* was this dauntless little ship's name; her commander was a man of few words.

"I'll take you back again," said he, clinching the bargain with a Goliath grip of his huge hairy fist. "You want to see the British fighting fleet? Well, you will see it, no doubt. And, possibly, the German ships too. We will run for Heligoland, sir, or somewhere near it. Maybe take a peep out of the corner of our eyes of a bit of the Kiel Canal. . . ."

"What about the mines?" I asked.

"Mines," said he? "I guess we can steer clear of them. I have marked out a course on the chart. It is free of fireworks."

## CHAPTER II

### RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

THE *Silver Star* lay alongside the wharf in Leith Dock with her red funnels smoking, her decks all glistening with crystals of brine, and the whole fabric of her reeking like a bacon shop on a hot Saturday night. A swarm of grimy men, half-naked, dead-eyed, and hoarse with fatigue, ran in and out of her; the over-worked donkey-engine clattered and clamoured, the derrick swung backward and forward, and at every swing hauled out from the hold eight whole carcasses of pig. The carcasses were flung on to the quay thudding, and showering brine like spray over a sore-eyed Territorial, whose thankless job it was to guard this business with a fixed bayonet and ten rounds of ball cartridge in his pouch.

Four thousand pounds' worth of bacon and butter was heaved out of the holds of this Danish food ship, to say nothing of innumerable cases of eggs as well; then this wholesale menu for the British breakfast table was pitched into a special train with extraordinary speed and sent full speed southward. . . .

"Faugh!" gasped the Territorial, wiping the

salt out of his stinging eyes. "I'll never stick my teeth into a rasher again as long as I live. . . ."

The captain stood aft by the gangway. He was getting up the steam of an enormous cigar, whilst the Customs officer, squatting by his side at a hastily improvised turnstile, licked the stump of his indelible pencil and prepared to receive the small stream of passengers. Three of them only were British—an attaché from the Embassy at Berlin and his young wife (bound for Copenhagen) and myself (bound for Heaven knows where). Mine was a roving commission.

"Awm awfu'y sorry to trouble ye," said the Customs man to me, taking another lap at his pencil, and disclosing a tongue already brilliantly violet, "but warr is warr, an' this is a proscribed port . . . an' if ye will be running the gauntlet I maun hae y'r fu' particulars."

So, aided by the captain, who jabbered alternately in Russian, Swedish, Danish, English and Scotch, the Customs man struggled nobly with puzzling, barbarous names—including that of a tall, splendid Russian, with a magnificent sweep of beard—and wrote us all down in detail.

"I'll make you a present of a fountain pen on the next trip," said the skipper, as he waved good-bye to the besmeared official with his



12.3 cheroot . . . and we were off in the blue haze of the night, creeping out of the dock, dead silent, like a cat on the stalk, to adventure across the North Sea to fetch more bacon for your breakfast and more eggs to fry with it, good friends at home !

We saw many interesting things as we stole off upon this burglarious errand. There was a cruiser with steam up, and her listening wireless spread from mast to mast, hiding craftily behind a tall dockside warehouse, with only a scrap of her top-hamper visible to our little ship as she warped out of the basin. Along the seawall, lying *perdu* also, were half a dozen "D" submarines—clean, slim, grey-skinned sharks, fretting to be away at their devilish business ; their crews sitting on the wall, swinging their legs and smoking ; the little gate at the end of the groyne chained and padlocked and guarded by a kilted Terrier, knees and bayonet naked. And there were other things—secret things, extraordinarily interesting, which I may not write of (with the eye of the Censor still peering over my shoulder), but which could tell you, if I did, how completely, how wonderfully, the Navy was awake to the needs of this little nation of ours.

We swung out to the open sea under the flaming sword of the revolving light on ——— Island. Another blade of dazzling silver

watching the sea from another and a more distant island leapt out of the night, and as these two whirling weapons met under the blue-black canopy of Heaven one seemed to hear the clash. . . .

Supper was served at ten—a rich abundance of Scandinavian food piled under a comforting cluster of Union Jacks. Our Viking skipper, spite of the smallness of his craft, saw to that.

“Rations of war,” said he, with a chuckle, as he helped himself to an immense plateful of paté.

The magnificent Russian appeared in evening dress, and a diamond in his shirt-front. Whereat we all marvelled. Surely he was a count, at the very least! But he ate nothing but bread and butter—stacks of it! The next morning he appeared at breakfast again in his immaculate wardrobe. The mystery was solved. He had no other clothes.

One by one the consoling coast lights winked and went out. We were alone under the stars, flung like diamond dust athwart the sky. Like a poaching lurcher free at last of the homestead we gathered courage at our lonesomeness, and sneaked on full pelt, our heels kicking out a smother of white spray behind us. So we ran across the North Sea until the very stroke of midnight.

Up on the bridge the captain shifted his cigar from port to starboard and sniffed.

"I smell ships," he said, "ships all around." And he wagged his smart little grey wisp of beard.

Then a flicker came over the sea—a flicker of multitudinous needles of light radiating fanwise from a centre miles and miles away. Just a flicker, and no more. Darkness again. And then, from another quarter, away on our starboard bow, another little flirting fan of light, and again inky blackness.

"They've seen us," said the skipper and, tossing his cigar overboard, he clapped his hand to the little lever and rung down a *ting-ting-ting* to the engine-room. Our sea-lurcher stuck her back heels into the ocean, so to speak, and slithered along, vibrating at the shock.

Suddenly a terrific explosion of light smote us amidships and stayed there—an angry, commanding eye of molten silver in the stare of which every detail of our little ship leapt out in amazing clearness. I noticed the wart just over the skipper's left eyebrow as though I were examining it through a microscope. . . . This great, frightening eye rushed down upon us with meteor swiftness, and then paused. From behind it a voice spoke—a calm, even, gentlemanly, very young voice (tuned, I swear,



in the Marlboro' class rooms, and not so very long ago, either) through a megaphone :

“ What the hell, sir, are you in such a hurry for ? ”

“ Sorry,” said the captain. “ But we wern't expecting visitors this trip. We're going to fetch food. Pigs, for Leith, Edinburgh, London, Manchester —— ”

The eye winked once, and from behind it the voice spoke again, commanding the skipper to lay by until dawn.

“ But we shall miss the morning tide —— ” the skipper fretted.

“ Can't help it,” was the reply. “ Stay where you are until it's light. Your pilot'll be aboard in an hour—(how in the world did this young Cyclops know ?)—and your course will be —— —— —— .”

“ Might as well make it Iceland,” growled the skipper. “ But I guess beggars can't be choosers in these jumpy times. Iceland it is, then.”

“ As you please, Mr.—Mr.—Lipton. Good-night ! ”

The eye closed. Utter blackness drenched us once again. We blinked out over the jet sea, saw nothing, and only heard the swish of the little nighthawk-of-war's skirts, as she turned and dashed away to spy elsewhere.

So we lay on the flat sea until the morning,

not daring to move a waggle of our screw, for the swift little patrols were still holding us and flirting their fans over us daintily, as though we were a ballroom dame of high degree sitting out a polka, instead of a grunty little pig-ship, carrying a rasher ardent as our house-flag.

The dawn loomed up grey and cold, and when the sun at last blazed out we found ourselves in a sea swept clear of everything. Not even a feather of smoke marked the wide circle of the horizon! The night watchers had vanished. We sailed the whole day long and saw nothing but an empty biscuit-box. Spotless, immaculate, the Russian count aired himself in the heartening sunshine, still in his evening dress.

At dawn next morning we crawled into the Danish port of Esbjerg and were received by that neutral community, to our astonishment, like conquering heroes. The local newspaper gave a huge placard to announce our arrival, and a young gentleman with a very large notebook interviewed me at great length. A little barber from Camberwell, who had sailed, greatly daring, with us, walked off with his neat bag of razors and a small valise slung at his shoulder to look for customers in one of the small corners of Europe where (at present) there is no war, and where the wide-chinned populace have plenty of leisure for the luxury of a regular shave.

And the Russian count, having cleaned up his shirt front with breadcrumbs,<sup>\*</sup> bade us a stately farewell, chartered the only taxicab in Esbjerg—a huge contraption like an armoured train—and whirled off to the railway station to catch the next train for Copenhagen.



## CHAPTER III

### THE MINE-SWEEPERS

THE winds of the North Sea carry no tales of what is moving there. In Esbjerg, as in Edinburgh, it is the same. Every evening the warm mists roll up over the delectable Isle of Fanö—no longer hilariously gay, as it should be at this time of the year, with its crowds of rich German “seasiders” making merry, but bleak and glum as an island of the dead—deep shadows move, shadowed deeper with forebodings and mutterings of martial things. Every morning the sun climbs up and shows us an empty sea—a sea of boundless peace, swept clear of alarms and murmuring lazily.

But at night strange, uncanny things are moving. Phantoms are abroad; eerie lights glitter and gleam; here across the sky and there athwart the water the swift searchlight comets of the German ships of war brandish their crystal tresses, rip livid, lightning wounds through the fog, and are swallowed into the darkness again. The desultory boom of guns from afar tells us that something is happening. But what — ?

After dinner—that too satisfying Danish

dinner of piled profusion—we sit at the open window of the hotel and stare out seaward with wondering eyes. Carl steals in with the coffee and, whispering that the last boat in at the harbour has brought news, steals out again to glean the dregs of it. On the balcony, apart from us all, and sitting tense-faced and mute at a little marble-topped table, Father Joseph, the pastor, gazes out too, as we are gazing, at the mist which hides the sea. But it is not of the sea he is thinking. His five stout sons, all in honourable employment in Schleswig-Holstein, were swept off to the wars by the Germans and placed with other Holsteiners in the front of the fighting line. And news had come through this day that three of them had been killed outright.

The heavy door leading to the restaurant swings open with a bang, and a polyglot crowd clatters in, ragged, worn, travel-stained, half-starved, and wholly desperate. They jabber in every European language except perhaps English, and high above the jabber soars the sing-song plaint of the American tourist thwarted of his pleasure and querulously railing at creation.

This sort of scene is repeated regularly whenever a boat arrives from one of the Scandinavian islands, or the Copenhagen “express” flounders in, with an extra cattle truck or two

hitched on behind to accommodate the human overflow.

Esbjerg just now is a sort of international clearing-house for desperate adventurers trying frantically to get into Russia or seeking with equal avidity to get out of it. It is the only way in or out now, with the rest of Europe all seething in the devilish cauldron of war. And never was so piteous a pilgrimage to be seen. The Americans bear it worst of all.

At the tail of this boatload of blanched, feckless folk comes the captain, shepherding them. He is a Dane—hard, mahogany-toned—a sea-rover with pirating blood in him and, like my giant friend of the *Silver Star*, with very little to say. I never saw eye of clearer blue in any man. The *Silver Star* has been held up. This new captain sails to-morrow night—night, or the cold, clammy grey of breaking dawn sees the beginning of the end of all these trips. He will take me—"Ja!" But why?

The North Sea, I tell him, is good for a man. It blows health into him.

"And sometimes it blows him up," says the skipper, with an eruptive jerk of his great brown hands, magnificently descriptive.

"But I do not think there is danger of mines now. The fishermen have been out after them day after day, and there is talk down at the



harbour of twenty-seven hooked and landed. To-morrow morning—you have near a full day before we sail—go out and see for yourself.”

So to-morrow morning out I venture, with a creepy feeling at the back of my neck, in a sort of lumbering old washing-tub, all beam, fitted with a consumptive little motor and manned by a listless Norwegian and his small son, who is both engineer and navigating officer. It is a dreary business. The sea has a nasty pitch to it, and we flop sickently over heavy, oily waves, and say never a word, but squat all humped and sullen behind the tin splashboard of the stinking, spluttering motor.

We swing round by Fanö's sandy and deserted promontory, where the famous golf links lie, and after hours of far niente anything but “dolce,” we meet the homeward-bound mine-sweepers—huge, flat-bottomed fishing ships built with great heaviness against the sudden rages of temper this North Sea flies into without warning, and rigged very strangely with sails brown and white and patched everywhere like the hinder parts of ancient Dutch trousers. . . . These lumbering arks, with their shallow draught, are immune from mines, so they can “fish” for them as though they were no more harmful than mackerel. They hunt in couples, tethered like greyhounds. The

leash is a long steel wire tethering ship to ship, and sunk to a certain distance. So—very simply, and fairly safely, is this mine-angling done, and when the anchored engine of destruction is hooked, there is a performance something akin to the sudden “blowing” of a harpooned cachalot . . . and that is all.

But give me mackerel fishing, for choice, any day.

We steered our tub well out of range of the groping hawser, hailed the anglers (sitting humped and nodding over their sport for all the world like Broadland bream rods-men), and heard from them that they had toiled all day over a cunningly charted course and had caught nothing. The total bag reported in Esbjerg earlier in the week as seven-and-twenty was an exaggeration. It was seventeen.

The charted course we were to sail in the bacon boat to-morrow night was clear of submarine fireworks anyway. So we turned the squat nose of our washing tub and coughed home wearily to Fanö, having raised a quaint corner of the curtain in this bewildering theatre of war: men fishing for sudden death with the nonchalance of eel-dibbers, and smoking and drowsing at their work!

The night mist was creeping up over the sea, the brown sails turned black, and the harbour lights were flashing a warning home

call to us as the Norwegian child tipped the last canful of lubricator into the hoarse throat of the consumptive little engine and stretched himself wearily. His father spat over the side into the sea, contemptuously.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE HANDY MAN AT HOME

POST haste we slapped five hundred tons of breakfast bacon, eggs and butter into our hold, painted the Scandinavian name of our new home-going steamer in black letters a yard high port and starboard on our grey hull, so that there should be no mistake in the matter of our identification, and warped out of the harbour for England, or Scotland, or as near as we could get across the hazardous highway of the North Sea. Kiel perhaps! You never know your luck in these adventures!

The ship stank of bacon; the steward jibbered and blabbered through his porthole as he saw land slipping away from him; the captain alone of the crew showed any signs of cheerfulness. Having slept in my clothes for four days I longed for a bath, and wandering amid musty corridors I at last, to my joy, found a latched door labelled "Bad." But the bath was full of bacon!

Our course, fixed by the mine-sweeper's chart, was round-about and worrying. We were obliged to take a wide semicircular sweep of the sea, very nearly two hundred

miles northward of Fanö. Here, at any rate, we should miss the mines; but the betting was two to one on running into some of the German scouts. And, sure enough, some hours after nightfall, we did.

There was a head wind on, and the disturbed sea was battering and hammering all over our steel hull. I was sleeping in the "saloon" on deck, away from the choking odour of the two Russians who shared my cabin below, when I was awakened by the unmistakable popping of guns. Popguns, it sounded like. We were running seventeen knots, and settling down to it snugly enough, ready for a dirty night. I had counted six shots before we condescended to bide our way; as we eased up, another missile plumped into the sea just ahead of us, marking its target with an admiration note of white foam as it fell. An inquiring searchlight slapped us full in the face, and we pulled up, snorting.

In a minute or two, with a very great show of fuss and clatter and ceremony and salutation, a German officer boarded us from a panting little box of tricks which we could just see tossing in the darkness below. It was quite a state ceremony. Our captain bared his bullet head and bowed low. The officer saluted, stiff as a ramrod.

The scene which followed was sheer un-

diluted comic opera, and not war at all. Our visitor was young and fair, with a very red face and light eyes which flickered uncertainly under eyebrows almost white. Why, he demanded first of all, hadn't we stopped sooner? Why had it been necessary to waste nine shots over us? The tenth shot would have settled our business once and for all.

"Never heard you sooner," replied the captain. "Your powder isn't noisy enough. But I am sorry to have caused all this unnecessary ceremony. We're all right, sir, we are a neutral ship with cargo, chiefly bacon——"

"Where for?"

"England."

The German naval officer shook his head.

"No, certainly not!" said he. "You must take this ship to Hamburg!"

Here was a pretty look-out. Our faithful skipper, however, was equal to the occasion. He declared that a trip to Hamburg was absolutely impossible just now. It would disorganize the whole cargo service of his mightily important fleet of breakfast liners. This neutral ship was carrying dead food to England; other neutral ships in the same line were carrying live food to Germany—cows chiefly, whose milk long ago had ceased, and horses of an age which had rendered them unfit for work.

"Do you know," he said, "that since this



war began, Denmark has sent into Germany supplies to the value of two and a half million kronen ? ”

The German officer knew nothing whatever about it. He hesitated. He scratched his head ; and in the sway of his indecision, the captain's arguments swung him round to the point of view our intelligent skipper was anxious to drive into him.

“ Well, I suppose you must go on,” said the German at last ; and the captain again swept off his peaked cap and bowed low.

“ Tak' ” said he.

The young gentleman from the destroyer returned the compliment. He had his hand on the rail preliminary to clambering down again when another suspicion held him back.

“ Have you any passengers on board ? Any English ? ” said he.

The skipper did not, evidently, think it fit to imperil his mortal soul by unnecessary lying.

“ Do you think, sir,” he said—still with his hat in his hand—that any passengers would be fools large enough to travel a route like this at a time like this ? ”

“ But the English are always fools,” declared the young officer ; and with this parting shot and more ceremonious bowing he clambered down the slippery sides of our little ship and

left us to carry on the remainder of our journey in peace.

As we gathered way over the slapping sea the destroyer's searchlight followed us with an angry eye, watching us reluctantly off the premises.

There followed a day of hot sunshine and languid calm. We slipped along merrily across a halcyon sea, seeing nothing and hearing nothing.

But at night, again, there were visions about and excursions and alarms upon the lapping water. At two in the morning, when the captain declared that the way was clear and that we should be no more troubled with ships of war, the haze which had enfolded us suddenly lifted, and we saw a few miles away the riding lights of British destroyers. At first we thought it was land we had sighted; but now one pair of lights and then another began to move, swiftly passing and repassing one another. Then, suddenly, as though a commanding finger had flicked down the switch, they all went out.

The captain stopped this time, and stopped quick! The anchor cable ran out with a roar, and scarce had it ceased when a smart little patrol boat came alongside with a fighting crew of three, all told, on board. No ceremony this time, no clatter, no flap! A petty

officer swarmed up the rope ladder like a monkey. His business with the captain was over in next to no time.

“All right,” says he, “carry on! Any British passengers on board?”

“Gentleman asleep on the sofa in the saloon,” replied the captain.

The gentleman asleep in the saloon—and I was that individual—happened to be very widely awake at the moment. I slithered out with my naked feet on the cold, damp deck, to greet this young man of the sea.

“Papers all in order, sir?” said the petty officer.

They were.

“And may I be so bold as to ask what you are doing on this trip?”

I assured him that I hadn't the slightest idea, and he laughed. “Well——”

“And how are you all over there?” I asked, pointing into the darkness where a little time back the ships had been winking to one another.

“Oh, we're all right,” said he; “fit enough—but bored. This is a slow game. Any news of anything? We're just waiting.”

I told him all I knew, and that was a week old, and more, and scrappy . . . .

“Have you got anything to read, sir? Any old thing that you don't happen to want?”



All I had was a pocket edition of "The Heart of Midlothian." He accepted it thankfully, crammed it into the pocket of his thick pea-jacket, and off he went in the darkness with a broad grin of good-fellowship lighting up his chubby face.

"Good luck and keep your peckers up!" I called over the side.

"Thank you, sir! You bet we will! Cap'n — carry on!"

In a flash the patrol boat was off and away, and that's the last I saw of the British watchers at sea. It wasn't much, but it was comforting and cheering, and the bright spirit of my friend the petty officer rounded it off with just the right touch.

We came to port in the bright dayshine, with our cargo of pigs unravished, and not a single shell in our cases of eggs so much as cracked. So please remember our little ship, good citizens at home, as you sit over your breakfast and eggs and bacon. That rasher you are now eating may, for all you or I can tell, have been in Hamburg to-day but for the argumentative eloquence of our brave Danish skipper. And it may have emerged triumphant from the bathroom I sought so eagerly at the end of the stuffy corridor of the s.s.—— that exciting morning. You never know!

The spirit of Rip Van Winkle is over the

North Sea: there seems no doubt of that. The German fleet is bottled up safe, but savage, behind Heligoland, and hiding like the great ugly coward it is in the armoured corridor of the Kiel Canal. Only a few raiders are out and about—swift, sneaky Uhlans of the sea. I hear of this on the misty rainy morning of my arrival at Leith Dock; I hear also from another food ship that has run the gauntlet, like ours, that a third steamer within hailing distance of our own crafty little vessel was blown sky high by mines yesterday afternoon. My skipper, who is standing by, blows a whiff from his pipe and shrugs his massy shoulders—

“Ah,” says he—puff, puff—“then the mines are drifting”—puff, puff—“with the swing of the tide in the fairway! It is unpleasant. Other ships are following us: if they have our luck I shall be surprised.” \*

I invite the captain to dinner in Edinburgh; we have a royal time—but no schnapps, for the absence of which I apologize.

“And where next?” asks the Dane, poisoning a toothpick the size of a penholder. “Another trip to Esbjerg?”

I shake my head. I do not relish it. Esbjerg is a dull place, and besides, the probability of German mines making mincemeat of me for

\* The skipper was right. Eight ships running the gauntlet and immediately following mine, were blown up in the supposed “clear” fairway!

a menu of a shoal of North Sea herrings is not altogether alluring. . . . .

France is aflame—so on to France. No more bacon ships, thanks; and to tell the truth, this calm empty sea is getting on my nerves.



## CHAPTER V

### TO PARIS

RUSH, scramble, scurry; the Boat Express, jammed with soldiers and their kit—Folkestone packed with a flower garden of gay, rich fugitives taking the air under crimson and blue sunshades; at the harbour, bayonets gleaming in the hot sunshine; the steam siren of the Channel packet screaming, and at the gangway a charming lady whom I know, her face grey, and her voice urgent—imploring.

“Boulogne?” says she. “For heaven’s sake do not attempt to go there! My husband has just returned with terrible tales! The Germans. . . .”

Ah! these terrible tales! Moonshine, surely: for when I get to Boulogne in the evening glow, all is quiet; gay bathers are laughing and rollicking along the Plage; the little gendarmes with their absurd-looking “red flannel” trousers are lounging about with nothing apparently to do; and at the station a pleasant official smiles and says, “À Paris, M’sieur? Oui, certainement! The train is going almost at this moment. En voiture, M’sieur! These tales of alarm are—just tales of alarm.

They mean nothing—pouf ! A pleasant journey, M'sieur ! ”

A pleasant journey ! For the time, perhaps, yes ! The Countess X—— and her husband are my fellow passengers. We engage in a game of three-handed bridge ; we gamble riotously to pass the time, for my pockets are abulge with hundred-franc notes to carry me through the siege of Paris and I do not care. Siege, forsooth ! The nearer we get to the Gay City, the more ridiculous this tale of investment becomes. . . .

“ Pray, join us at dejeuner at Maxim's to-morrow,” says the Countess.

“ I shall be delighted——”

The train stops with a sudden jerk, as French trains always do. The gold-topped scent-bottle of the Countess falls with a crash upon the floor. We are at some wayside station. The door swings open. Clamour, clamour, clamour upon the platform ! A wild surge of people—civilians and soldiery. A French officer staggers into our carriage. His face is bloody and bandaged. Two of his finger-nails are torn away. Upon his heels come others, fear stamped upon their faces. A young peasant woman with a tiny baby at her breast is the last to be squeezed into our compartment. I surrender my seat. . . . “ Merci, M'sieur ! ” The baby stares, owl-eyed, upon us all. Silently the mother weeps.

The Countess gathers up the cards. "We will continue our game at a time more opportune," says she.

Dawn. At Gournay station. Another battering, clamouring crowd of fugitives. Out of a tumble of grey cloud the sun climbs, angry, with a bloated face: not our own mild, sweet September sun of placid England, surely, but some bibulous, reckless relation, intemperately roaming heaven. . . . .

England, the dear homeland, seems thousands of miles away. Is it conceivable that only a few hours ago I was in the quiet little garden in Maida Vale, in a deck-chair and dreaming over Denys? I pinch myself; but the dream, if dream it be, remains. War is beating her wings all around me. I climb, stiffly, out of the carriage and mingle with the medley. Line upon line of troop trains crowd the junction. Horse-boxes interminable, each box labelled "*Hommes 48; chevaux 8,*" and scored in chalk upon the woodwork rough jests of war, caricatures of the Kaiser in all manner of ridiculous poses, and ever the inscription "*À Berlin, à Berlin!*" Soldiers and horses rammed in together amid the straw; the men hot, sweating, dusty, but cheerful enough. These men and I are sworn brothers in next to no time. My arm is sore with the tremendous

handshaking I have to go through; all my cigarettes have long since vanished. Slowly the troop trains move out of the junction, in a wreath of blue, caporal cigarette-smoke. The French army smokes my good health—" *Bon voyage*, and a safe return"—as it moves off to war. *À Berlin!*

Six hours, at least, to wait at Gournay whilst the soldiers are shoved through, to fling themselves, ardent and throbbing, around their beloved capital. This is not good enough for me; so I bow *au revoir* over the jewelled hand of the Countess, her gold-topped cut-glass and her diamond studded bridge marker, and set off "*À Paris!*" by another way—by road. A long detour southward; roads astream with fugitives, the white dust rolling, rolling; all quick progress barred; no food, no drink, the bibulous sun now mad drunk, fuming overhead. All the world upside down and demented. . . . .

Strange, what little turns and twists our fancy takes in times of sore stress. What was I thinking of in this dreary, dusty plod city-wards. The wounds of war? A fair city trembling behind the thud of alien siege-guns? The bloody-faced French officer with the torn finger-nails? No! I was working out in my mind again and again the play of that last



bridge hand with the Countess X—— in the Paris train. A battery of French artillery swung splendidly by in a fantastic whirl of dust. A few short hours ago I should have been thrilled and stirred at the sight of it. But now—so speedily does one's mind and body merge into the prevailing atmosphere—I moved out of the way of the grinding wheels half unconsciously. . . . .

“ Ah! I've got it at last! If only I had finessed the knave of spades——! ”

Next evening. Still outside Paris; but northward this time and close to Chantilly, the famous racing headquarters of French sport. A wayside inn—the Tavern of the Cochon d'or. Everything quiet, peaceful, dreamy, beautiful. Bonny hostess. A meal for the very gods up in Olympus. Delicious soup; a rare omelette; bifteak (actually!); patisserie melting in the mouth; *vin rouge*; coffee; cognac; tobacco. . . .

MADAME: “ Is it true, monsieur, all this we hear of the war, and the danger to Paris; the bombs of Le Bosch——? ”

MYSELF: “ True? Well, there are tales, madame; I am beginning much to doubt them; but anyway, here you are safe! ”

MADAME: “ Assuredly, m'sieur; nothing ever happens here—*Rien—rien!* Ennui is our

daily fare! If you are going to Paris, and should be at any time near the Rue du Havre, I have a brother, m'sieur. . . . A thousand thanks! Bonjour!"

I turn down the lane. The arrow-head on the signpost points to Paris—so many kilometers. By moonrise, I shall be there: an easy, pleasant journey. . . . Why, I wonder, cannot they cook and serve in England such delicious meals as the one I am now digesting?

At the next cross-roads the sudden clatter of many feet; whips cracking, voices shouting. Another cavalcade: the strangest I have yet seen. A pony-chaise, drawn by a perplexed thoroughbred three-year-old. In it a man and a woman; behind, all manner of *lares et penates* loaded up; still further behind, a string of racehorses swaddled in their rungs and pack-saddled with other household goods. I stop the driver and ask him—he is a square-faced Yorkshireman—what in the world is up!

"Oop?" says he, and his tired eyes seem to smoulder through the grime on his face. "Oop? The devil's oop; and there's ragin' tearin' hell goin' on a few miles away!"

A man of few words, this Yorkshire trainer; but he crams a whole volume into them. Uhlands raiding Chantilly. Bridge blown up with a roar that set all the horses screaming and kicking. Drawing-room window smashed

to smithereens. Stables raided out beyond the town. Two-year-olds collared for light cavalry work—"Dom'd lot o' good they'll be for *that* job!" Aery-o-plane overhead marking the clear road. Yorkshire trainer and missus, with their treasures wrapped up in a horse-rug, shove La Princesse into the shafts of the chaise and do a quit—double-quick. Germans (the raiding patrols scouting for a clear run to Paris) close behind. Mile further along the road a handful of English Tommies hiding in the ditch with two or three machine-guns screened behind the nettles and the keck.

"Hi!" says one brown-faced Tommy to the trainer. "You English?"

"Ai!" replies the Yorkshireman.

"And who are the blighters comin' on behind—French?"

"No; Germans!"

"By——!" says Tommy. "Out of the way, and let's have a smack at the ——s. Out you get—sharp!"

Out they get—sharp; and in another minute they hear the withering cackle of the maxims, "like ten hundred thousand bloomin' tin cans being rattled with pokers"—screams of torn horses—cries of mutilated men; and over all the triumphant pæan of Tommy—"Give 'em hell, boys! Give the blighters what for!"

They get "what for"—the blighters. Those

who can, turn tail and tear off. Others are floundering and writhing in the dust—now turned into a horrible mess of red mud. The Taube aeroplane, with a flick of its nasty fish-tail, soars away into the sunset. The situation is saved.



## CHAPTER VI

### AN ARMY MARCHING TO WAR

PARIS at last. Not the old gay, jubilant Paris of my fond and frivolous memories, but a city trying hard to smile and looking very dejected over it. It is evening. The gaiety of the boulevards is turned down to a mere glimmer. Streets beyond are dark; houses shuttered, lights out; every shop closed and sad-faced concierges squatting on their doorstep. I lose my way in these once familiar streets; but presently find a friend who pilots me back to the boulevards. By this time the night is black overhead, pierced with millions upon millions of twinkling diamonds. Athwart the sky, with measured rhythm, the silver sword of the great searchlight on the Eiffel tower flashes its blade high over the quiet city—searching, searching heaven for the roaming night-hawks of the investing hosts of Germany massed somewhere—and nearer than most of the citizens dream—beyond the city walls.

My friend—quiet, lazy, fat, and well-filled with the good things of this world—takes me by the arm. “Come, *mon ami*,” says he, “we will dine together on the meagre siege rations

at the Brasserie Universalle. There you shall tell me the news. In Paris we have no news—no news of the war, anyway. We might as well be in Birmingham or Bedford. You are a traveller arrived from the world of moving things. You will be welcome!”

At the Brasserie I meet the same familiar crowd, all babbling over the trifling boulevard news of the day. They ask me, as a voyager of war, the news from the battlefields. I tell them briefly—for I am utterly weary—the little tale of my Yorkshire trainer, the raiding ride of the Uhlans down the white road beyond Chantilly, and the murdersome business of the English Tommies in the ditch with their rattling machine guns.

“Chantilly?” murmurs my fat friend. “Pouf—it’s all a fairy tale you’re telling us. It’s no good trying to pull our legs in that way.”

They all laugh and won’t believe a word. And, after all, why worry? The *hors d’œuvres* in that snug little room upstairs are as good and as abundant as ever they were.

Paris again — next day, and the next. Quieter than ever. No bomb-dropping aeroplanes; no thudding of machine guns; no Uhlans dashing along the Place de l’Opéra; no excitement; no theatres; nothing to drink

after 9 P.M.; Paris tucked up and asleep in bed at ten—fancy that! This is no place for me! I am off again to look for War.

It is far more difficult to get out of Paris than to get into it. They are cutting down the trees in the Bois de Boulogne, carrying them out beyond the barriers to screen the newly-dug trenches. The gates are sentinelled. A yellow pass from the Minister of War, now in safe retreat in far away, sunny Bordeaux, is—luckily for me—the open sesame to the locked and guarded portals. A mile out I am stopped by the flicker of a too-familiar bayonet. So I must try another way. How and by what means—never mind. I am away at last, beyond the sentinels and the trenches screened with the drooping boughs from the Bois, tearing along the white, smooth roads north-westward to the realms where excitement reigns. Peace—still peace; the summer sun flaming overhead; the apples ripening in the long avenues; cattle browsing in the fields; peasants singing about their daily business. No mutter of war; not even a fish-tailed Taube cruising amid the clouds. The day advances; the long, white roads stream past. Presently I am in the cool, green aisles of the outskirts of the Forêt de Crécy. Peacefuller and quieter than ever! Cock pheasants, gorgeous in their early autumn

plumage, race along the roadside, keeping pace with my automobile until, with a half-human laugh, they dart into the undergrowth. We swing round into another glade. By magic, the scene is suddenly changed. I run, full tilt, into the French Army—miles and miles of it, moving along the forest road with never a sound beyond the rumble of the heavy wheels of the artillery, and now and again the clink of scabbard upon stirrup iron.

You at home who read this may perhaps like to know what it is to see an army marching to war. There is little thrill in it; no visible excitement, no clamour of bands, no waving of banners, no singing. The men save their breath to cool their pugnacious porridge. Their eyes are not ablaze; they do not hurry—they just simply lope along, at the easiest possible pace, slack-shouldered, smoking, and uncannily silent. But, somehow, there is a look in their eyes that is unfathomable. What visions do they see ahead? Each man has his own, but it is neither a vision of fear, nor of regret, nor of anything troublous—you may be sure of that! Just a dream, with a little flash now and then of the peaceable homestead left far behind; the wife, the sweetheart, the child, maybe—and at the back of it all the throb to be home again with this dreadful war over and done with. . . .



The thunder clouds roll up. The storm bursts. Down comes the rain, torrent upon torrent of drenching thunder shower. Silently, silently, they grope through the rain, these men of the Western Army. The cavalry horses, led in pairs with saddle and bridle stowed away in the rear (to ease their burden until the call comes to dash into it), are most dejected and downcast, with the rain running in small rivers over their hocks, their manes dripping, and their skins ashine.

The guns are mackintoshed and swaddled as jealously as if they were tender young ladies braving a trip through April showers. Then comes the endless string of wagons packed with stores and food and ammunition—motor vans, lorries, motor buses with the tops shaved off, taxicabs ticking off fortunes of twopences which will never be collected—and, anon, a steam engine bearing the famous agricultural men of Aveling and Porter, lugging along an astonishing circus of things. This sudden glimpse of Sanger in a wilderness of war makes me smile, in spite of myself. Indeed, the whole procession reminds me of a circus jogging along contentedly, as I have seen it many a time, from town to town between fair and fair.

To-morrow, next week—any time apparently—would do for this strange conglomeration of mankind, animals, and machinery to get

there. Yet, everything is timed to the minute. *Festina lente*—"hasten slowly"—is the signal motto of every moving army: hasten slowly until you get to the fighting front, and then —

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PITEOUS PILGRIMAGE

ON the way to Gournay—a shining, splendid morning, with all the preliminary bustle of war around me—I halt on the roadside, back my car to the shade of a cool linden tree, open my pack of stores, and have a light agreeable luncheon: sardines, crisp, crusty bread, a slab of delicious Brie cheese, a stick of Plasmon chocolate, and a tin cup of blazing hot coffee from my companionable thermos flask (a friend, so often in need, that never leaves me). We sit by the roadside, chauffeur and I, the only civilians, apparently, in all this strange alluring world of soldiers, soldiers, soldiers—soldiers and guns and gear and horses—and consider the situation. We have maps of the road, but no news of the war at all. All we know is that in some wonderful way the huge, terrible juggernaut of the Prussian hordes has been checked at last in its terrific swoop upon Paris; that all around the city guardian troops are pouring in to quell the invader, that miles upon miles of trenches are being flung up, the too-daring Uhlans “finding a way,” like Sentimental Tommy, through the romantic

glades of Chantilly, driven back, and that the Prussian, gripped at last, is grinding his teeth, and fighting desperate and bloody rearguard actions amid the leafy roads leading down to the valley of the Marne.

Where to venture next I had not the slightest idea. The French officer who presently rode up to ask my business (he was excessively polite and nice) was just as much in the dark as I.

“What do you think——?” I asked. The captain shrugged and spread out his white hands.

“Monsieur,” said he, “the soldier is not allowed to think. When he is at war he is a man no longer: he is a machine—just a little, little cog in the wheel of affairs. And he is quite content to be that. He simply obeys. He has no anxieties, no trouble of any kind. I have none; the men you see marching and riding by along this dusty road have none. So, *bonjour, m’sieur*, and a pleasant journey wherever you may be bound!”

He salutes gravely, and rides on.

I turn to my chauffeur. “Well, my friend, and what is your idea of the situation?”

Max takes in a huge draught of caporal tobacco-smoke, blows it out through his nose. “M’sieur,” says he, “the chauffeur who is engaged by his patron at two francs a kilometre is not paid to think. He is a machine, m’sieur—a little, little cog in the great wheel. . . .”



I cannot help laughing at the dog.

Well, well, so be it! Here is the map; we will try the line on the north of Paris. Gournay, at any rate, is accessible.

At a wayside station I said good-bye to Max and near dawn next morning I was at Gournay in a wonderful silver blaze of moonlight—a night of amazing peacefulness and calm. The train I was in was bound for Beauvais, but at Gournay it was held up by a long string of Belgian engines coming in from that sad and shattered country.

“You can go no farther,” said the stationmaster. “Beauvais is impossible!” So we all got out—there were not many of us—and herded together on the platform, with no idea where we were going next or how we were going to get there. There were a few soldiers with us, and the good citizens of Gournay formed a circle around us, bared their heads, and sang with tremendous gusto the “Marseillaise.” Next, a halting verse of what I was able to recognize as “God Save the King,” and then—a sudden silence.

“Boom — boom — boom!” the guns were thudding northward over the mist which lay in this lovely Normandy valley like a fairy shroud. For three nights now friends and foes have been fighting in the moonshine. . . .

I asked the stationmaster where the noise of

this battle came from. He said Crève-cœur. There and at Conty and at Breteuil the extreme left of the Allies was holding the line, and had been holding it for several days. At Beauvais, too, desperate things were happening, or were just about to happen.

I spent the night on a bench in the little station hotel. The small boy who served my supper of most excellent chicken and red wine asked me wonderingly where I was going. I said I wished to see the gallant French fighting at Beauvais. But how to get there? Not a train, not a cab, not a bicycle, not a motor, and the way nearly thirty miles——

“Not an auto?” said the lad brightly. “Well, m’sieu, I believe there is one. An auto, m’sieur, with four wheels, even if only one cylinder out of three will work, is a treasure now. The soldiers come and borrow that treasure and redeem it later when the war is over, at good interest. The auto I tell you of is nearly broken in half, but it can go like fury if I can only find Jules for you. Jules and the auto are both in hiding. But—there is a way. Go to sleep, m’sieur, and at seven in the morning mad Jules may be here! *Bon soir, m’sieur.*”

And, to my astonishment, at seven in the morning, there was mad Jules at the door and the nearly broken-in-half car and all—and two

cans of spirit to feed it. Champagne—the very finest dry champagne—is cheaper than petrol hereabouts in these days. But it had to be done.

Jules, with whiskers sticking all out over his face like black pins in a pincushion, drove like a sheer madman. His name was appropriate enough. We whirled along through the streaming sunshine over the white, dusty roads at fifty miles an hour, free enough, and with all the way to ourselves for a time.

But, swinging to the north, we suddenly ran into bands of retreating pilgrims making their way to the coast. They came along the self-same road which saw the retreat of the fugitives in 1870.

It was a striking picture. They were nearly all women and children and boys—boys too young to fight for their country. A few old men, bent and gnarled with the toil of a lifetime, were with them here and there, but the women were doing all the work of the cavalcades. Here came wagon after wagon, some drawn by gentle, uncomplaining bullocks, and others by teams of four, and sometimes six, horses, yoked by huge, heavy chains.

The wagons were carpeted abundantly with straw and wheat—wheat swept wholesale from the fields by the way. On the straw lay and rolled and tossed the babies, amidships. For-

ward, the mothers wielded their heavy whips, urging the sweating cattle on. Aft were stowed and stacked the household gods—pots and pans, clocks, pictures, perambulators, chairs, cots, chests of drawers—everything and anything, in fact.

Crates of fowls were swung under some of the wagons—very astonished looking birds, most of them falling over one another as the vehicle lurched, flapping their wings, squawking and quarrelling among themselves. Strange it is how the long-forgotten fancies come back to one at such times. I was reminded by these bewildered birds of the nursery story, absolutely forgotten since early childhood, of Henny Penny and Cocky Locky. Mistress Hen meets Master Cocky in a strutting adventure along the dusty road :

*“ Where are you going, Henny Penny ? ”*

*“ I’m going to tell the King the sky is falling.”*

*“ May I go with you, Henny Penny ? ”*

*“ Oh, yes, Cocky Locky . . . ”*

One old granny sat up, prim and proper, in her favourite chair, which was lashed firmly amidships in one wagon. She swayed a bit as the lumbering conveyance jolted along, but she was fairly comfortable, screening the sun from her long solemn face with a huge gingham umbrella. Across the valley the guns began



to thud ; the old lady just jumped a little—that's all. She was getting used to this sort of thing.

Anon, there would be a halt by the roadside, with the teams drawn up out of the way of the passing show, and little parties of fugitives grouped under the trees and picnicking. Plenty of bread and cheese, sweet Normandy butter rolled coolly in a cabbage-leaf, red wine (always red wine !), and perhaps now and again a new-laid egg found in the straw at the bottom of the basket-crate under the wagon.

And so this procession passed on in amazing motley. Nobody seemed to be actually scared, though they could hear the growl of the distant artillery. They were taking their time in their journey—absolutely unaware that the Germans were very near them. They picnicked and bivouacked and slept on the roadside—and now and then some of them sang. . . . I shall never forget the sight as long as I live.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BEAUVAIS THE BOLD

JULES steered us by these patient, sun-baked pilgrims with great care, wagged his whiskers, and waved his unoccupied hand cheerily to them as we sped.

We ran into Beauvais at breakfast-time. As we entered the town at one end, the French garrison, which had been occupying it for the past ten days, left it at the other. The cavalry, looking very smart and trim, clattered gaily over the cobbled streets, by the beautiful cathedral; the artillery rumbled off, gun after gun, into the open country, and by ten there was not a single soldier in the town.

The population wrung their hands and ran clamouring to the Mayor, asking what they were to do. What was the meaning of this retreat, the withdrawing of those invincible guns, which had been hauled at so much cost of vigour to the green heights above the town overlooking the valley, through which the Germans were expected hourly? Nobody knew. There was some significant meaning in it. Eh?

“Keep calm, everybody!” cried his worship,

and issued a proclamation forthwith, declaring that everything was all right, that tranquillity existed, and would exist, and that business must be carried on as usual. Forthwith everybody bolted and barred his windows, and then poured into the streets.

Gallant, brave, beautiful Beauvais. In the turmoil of desperate things, just as she was near six hundred years ago, when Charles the Bold besieged her, ungarrisoned (as she was to-day) with an army of 80,000 Burgundians! In 1472 the citizens boldly closed their gates and maintained an obstinate resistance until succour arrived from Paris. The women then played chief part in the defence of their darling city; they guarded the walls and shared all the perils of the men. Jeanne Hachette, a fair fearless lass, whose statue still stands in the Market Square, appeared upon the breach at the moment of the fiercest assaults, seized a Burgundian standard which a soldier was endeavouring to plant on the walls and hurling the bearer to the bottom, bore it off in triumph to the town. This was on October 14, 1472, and every year on the Sunday nearest to that date a gay procession marches through the town to commemorate the event.

When I rode into the town, with all its fit men away at the war, the garrison fled, and the raiding Germans near at hand, this thrilling

history was within an ace of repeating itself. The city was calm—courageous drums were rolling at the street corners, the women thronged (the Beauvais maids are fair and fearless still, though centuries have passed) and all listened, heartened and cheered, to the proclamation of the Mayor bidding the citizens keep good courage. "Open your shops, your houses, your cafés, citizens! All's well!"

And as the little drum rattled its bold music, eight regiments of cavalry rode away hard for Crêvecœur and Breteuil, where the line was still being held. I found that the railway through Saint Omer-en-Chaussée and onward to Albarcourt was in the occupation of the French. Due west of Formerie the road was clear, and the glad tidings came through that our left was fighting hard to fall back steadily on a plan long ago conceived, to the banks of the Oise.

That fine stand is now history. It marked, on our western wing, the turning point of the war.

. . . . .

*"I do remember an apothecary. . . ."*

Before I leave Beauvais I must tell you the story of Monsieur X—— the little chemist who lives in the street of the Golden Moon. There is an old proverb which reads, "The apothecary's mortar spoils the luter's music." Here is a proof of it.



Monsieur X——— does a lot of district doctoring in the pauses between rolling pills and dispensing draughts. He is a rotund little man with a red, plump face, and a button nose upon the knob of which rests securely the bridge of a huge pair of spectacles. Behind the lenses a pair of childish blue eyes stare innocently. But he is adept at his art. His is a prosperous business, and he has a motor-car. He was out bravely enough, on one of the days when the hosts of Midian were prowling round and round the country, and came suddenly upon an English soldier sitting at the roadside nursing a wounded foot.

“You’d better look out, governor!” said Tommy, after the good-natured little pharmacist had banged him up and hoisted him into his car, “there’s a couple of them——Yewlans about here. So, unless you want to lose your car, hop it, matey, hop it!”

The apothecary was somewhat puzzled at the phraseology of his newly-found friend and patient; but he understood the drift of it, particularly as at that very moment they saw the raiders—two of them—riding easily through the trees down by the river, scarcely a mile away. So pharmacist and fighting man performed a judicious turning movement swiftly into the town, told the tale there, jammed a hood on to the car with a couple of men with

rifles under it, and "hopped" back again, the plump little pharmacist driving slowly with sublime and splendid innocence, with the afternoon sun flashing heliograph messages from the lenses of the large gold spectacles.

Presently they came upon the Uhlans, who held up the automobile with their usual fierce high and mightiness, and declaring that they had lost their way, demanded to be shown the direction, or——!

They spoke perfect French. They leaned over the saddle-bows of their swift horses; they produced their maps slung from their shoulders in neat leather cases with mica fronts. Which way had the French patrols gone? Surely they had been here or hereabouts yesterday——? The cavalry, the guns——?

The plucky pill-roller, without more ado, suddenly dropped his steering-wheel, produced an antiquated weapon from behind his seat and blew a hole, big enough to put your two fists through, into one of the horses. There followed a fierce, but harmless volley from behind the tilt, and a minute later two astonished and furious Uhlans were riding together as prisoners on their one surviving charger toward the peaceful capital of the department of L'Oise.

They were immured in a fine old stone mansion under the shadow of the cathedral, and there remained on show until an ambulance lorry

arrived in the city and carried them safely southward to Paris.

Between the two large coloured bottles in the chemist's window to-day stands a relic of that exciting afternoon—a Uhlan's spiked helmet, and underneath it written neatly in M. X——'s own hand, a prescription label bearing the words :

*À mort les Bosches !*

As for Monsieur X—— himself, he was promised a prominent place in the great procession of October 14 or thereabouts. You may be sure he had it.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE RETREAT OF THE EPICURES

I HAVE returned, by force of circumstances, to the Gay City—for a time, anyway. Paris is bearing up. Most of the shops and very many of the houses are closed and shuttered. The rich man has packed up his traps, and with his men-servants and maidservants, his oxen and his asses, the wife of his bosom and the children that are his, has slipped away either southward whither the Government has sped, or to the more pacific watering-places on the south coast of England.

The siege of Paris is bound to come, so I am assured by the babbling boulevarders whom I find still squatting in their favourite niches outside café and brasserie, like cathedral saints : more, perhaps, like gargoyles. . . . It will not be a starvation business, like the historic investment of '70. It will be speedy and astonishing, and no doubt disturbing. The patriotic citizens who are staying to see it through declare with all their hearts and souls that if the Germans do ride in under the mask of their great guns Paris may surrender herself—but she will do it street by street, inch by



inch, and die gloriously in the doing. But I don't think it will really be anything like that. We shall see.

Meanwhile, it is a dreadfully upsetting fact that you can't get a good dinner now at the Café —, world-famous for its choice fare. Many Parisians notorious in the city for the gods they make of their stomachs have been staying behind, simply because there is no place in the world so completely, so sumptuously satisfying as the Café —. The food yesterday was—well, suspicious. To-day some of it was really bad. The panic of the gourmands began. It spread along the Avenue de l'Opéra, it clamoured across the broad boulevards, and it died away in the booking-hall of the gloomy station of St. Lazare, where many fat gentlemen with handbags were bidding good-bye to the gay city for ever, with first-class single tickets for London.

We laughed at them as they waddled off.

There is still some comedy left in this gigantic drama. If there were not, it would be unbearable. So we go back to the café—after seeing our gloomy-avised Falstaffs away—and proceed to drown their sorrows and float ours in foaming beakers of *café au lait*.

“I am indeed sorry, messieurs,” says the tall garçon, as he bows before us, “but there is no more milk to-day. Even the cows are fighting

for us. . . . If messieurs will be content with tinned milk . . .”

The comedy carries on most engagingly, and the second act opens with Alphonse producing from under his apron a case of Monsieur Nestlé, which he brandishes triumphantly with one hand. With the other he flourishes a sardine-tin opener.

“ Ah ! ” says he, jabbing furiously at the tin, “ if this were only the neck of Wilhelm . . . ! ”

Before the dinner-knell rings out the balcony of this particular café fills up with a dirty, bedraggled, tired-eyed lot of men who, like the armies beyond the city, are “ resting ” for the week-end. Fleet Street in Paris ! Here we all are again, back from the tumultuous torrent of war—from Lille, St. Quentin, Amiens, Beauvais, from Breteuil and Crèvecœur, Pontoise, and Compiègne, and other places on the map which are making fresh history.

Here we all are, hustled and harassed left-wingers flung from pillar to post, tossed from Uhlan to Chasseur, and back again. No use for war correspondents in this war ! The army of the Allies—French and British alike—but particularly British—is rounding us up and heading us off with threats of imprisonment, fines, confiscation of kit and motor-car. Some of us (how impossible it all seems here in semi-careless Paris !) have actually looked down, flinching or

not, according to our kidney, the cold steel of a rifle barrel. Others have been collared by Uhlans and kicked ruthlessly out of the way. We don't brag about it : we have to grin and bear it. Not a man jack of us but has lost most of his baggage. Not a man with a whole sock to his foot or a clean collar to his neck. That extraordinary thing called the journalistic instinct has brought us all back to Paris for a brief spell, and the chance of a bath and a shave.

The bath costs half-a-crown ; the shave two francs. I have them both regardless. I buy a new hat—a trifle too friskily Parisian for my fancy—a new pair of boots, and then as I wander lazily across the Place de la Concorde I suddenly remember the countess in the train, the three-handed bridge gamble, and the invitation to dine at Maxim's. So I cross the Place and make my way to that palace of delights.

The blinds are down, the shutters clamped across the windows. The house is as grimly deserted and lone as the House of Usher. . . .

*Ah, la pauvre Comtesse !*

## CHAPTER X

### THE CORPORAL OF THE FOREIGN LEGION

HE swung into the café—a fine tall young soldier, stiff-shouldered, erect; his dark eyes afire.

“Jean!” he called, beckoning the fat garçon who was slithering along with a tray full of *aperitifs*.

“Jean!—the usual.”

“Monsieur,” replied the waiter. “But I do not know——” Then suddenly the light of recognition dawned. “*Tiens!* It is not possible. But—but, it is! Monsieur—a soldier! Wonderful! The usual? *Oui, monsieur, certainement!* It shall be produced instantly!”

This was the Café Napolitan, where the authors, the journalists, the poets (alas, 'tis a sad time for Parisian rhymes and epigrams now!) foregather every evening, each in his own seat, reserved absolutely for him and him alone. But the other day this new soldier was one of them—a poet, a dreamer, an avid socialist. The call had come swiftly; for the honour and flag of France this young man with the fine eyes had dashed his dreams and his rhymes aside to button the blue coat across



his swelling breast. He has cut his silken hair—the last sacrifice; but he bears even that bravely. He sits by my side in the café; his breath is hot with battle, though his limbs are sore with unaccustomed battering against the hard, strong things of the bellicose world.

“I am a raw hand,” says he—“a new boy; not only raw-handed, but raw-armed, raw-legged, raw-shouldered. But I am settling down as a machine of war, and it is magnificent. I love it! Mon ami, I love it!”

Great tales has this flame-eyed, big, eloquent boy to tell of the fighting around and about the forest of Compiègne.

The splendid incidents of this furious business were the feats of the British cavalry—General Chetwode’s Brigade—who did the most amazing things in a thunder-and-lightning hand-to-hand encounter with the German cavalry.

Twice the Scots Greys and the 9th Lancers rode smack through their opponents in a dash the dare-devilry of which was superb. They rode through them, smashed their line, and then turned and rode through them safe home again. Their casualties were few, but the trademark they left upon the enemy will never be forgotten. It demoralized them absolutely.

The British soldier (says my friend, carrying on his tale between great gulps of red wine—for he has only half an hour to spare before he

is back to the front) is plunging along beautifully, confident in his gallant heart that this swinging back towards the Oise and towards the Seine is all part of a very carefully worked-out scheme. Tommy has his grumbles, of course; and the worst of all is the fact that he can't get any hot food to eat. It is all cold tack and cold tack and the clamorous stomach of the British soldier do not exactly agree. Otherwise, he is all right, and still chanting with great vigour the Tipperary song.

Tommy has the utmost contempt for the German infantry's fire. "The Germans can't shoot for nuts!" says he. "He doesn't fire from the shoulder, like the English and French do, but from the hip. He never aims, he never picks out his man, but empties his cartridges clip after clip at wild and furious random. Again—the French and English officers lead their men into battle with reckless bravery. That accounts for the heavy casualties among them. And two furious hours of this week's fighting has left a bigger mark upon them, so it is said, than the whole period of the Boer War. They don't care. The heavier the trade-mark, the more the glory.

"The German officers' method of military stage management is altogether different from ours. Most of the time he is behind his men, driving them forward as a drover drives his

cattle, but with infinitely more callousness and more cruelty. His sword is in his right hand; his revolver in his left. And he is constantly using both.

“Already have I seen scores of German prisoners,” says my young socialist with an expressive shrug of his broad shoulders. “When they are captured they fall upon their knees, they fling off their helmets, they tear off their tunics, they bare their breasts, they grovel, and then—they toss their arms to heaven jabbering, jabbering, jabbering all the time in a piteous frenzy. It is a miserable sight. They expect to be killed straight away: they are amazed to find that no bullet, no bayonet comes their way.”

. . . . .

“Tommy,” says this tall young Frenchman, as he carries on his tale, with a flash half of amusement wholly of love, “Tommy goes into battle singing strange ribald songs which we cannot understand—something about ‘Tip, Tip, Tip, Tiperairé.’”

“He gets into trouble for this. His officer tells him to save his breath for other things. ‘Do not shout so,’ demands he. ‘It makes you thirsty, hoarse and thirsty, and water is not plentiful just now! Taisez vous!’”

“But”—and there was another smile from the light blue eye—“Tommy says he cannot help it. If he cannot shout and if he cannot sing he declares he will—will—what do you call it?—explode!

“And when he is hit he does not cry and he does not twinge. He just says ‘Blast!’ and if the wound is a small one he gets the man next to him to tie a tourniquet around it and settles down to fighting once more.

“And now,” cries my soldier friend, patting his corporal’s stripe lovingly, and rounding off his refreshers with a big brandy and soda—  
“And now, I must be away. To be a soldier is more than magnificent: it is sublime! One has no cares and no worries. One sinks one’s individuality absolutely, and becomes nothing but a cypher—a number, with nothing to do but to obey the order that comes, whatever it may be. I am No. 59. I am no longer a complicated box of tricks that has to think, to argue, to ponder whether it may be wiser to do this or to do that. I am told to go—I go. I am told to sleep—I sleep, flinging my already sore body (for, mon ami, I am a very raw recruit) upon the stony ground. But when I go, I go gladly; when I sleep, I sleep so soundly under the stars that sleep is a new and a wonderful mystery to me.

“Ah!—to be a soldier, my dear fellow, is



the most splendid rest cure in existence : the certain panacea for neurasthenia ! So, my friend, au revoir ! I go back, and with joy, to my rest cure under the hot sun and under the gleaming stars ! ”

He sprang up. He saluted, and turned and marched with a proud step out of the café.

Well—there’s a little picture for you, you boys at home—you footballers, you cricketers, you philanderers who lounge about town, buy your war editions regularly as they come out, and then join other loungers at some favourite bar.

Come out here, you lads with health and strength and spirit, come out and see or hear what Tommy is doing, how he is doing it, and with what a merry heart he jumps into the yawning trenches. His magnificent spirit would whip some responsive chord in you, and spur you on to dreams of glory. You couldn’t help it, in spite of yourself !

And if you cannot come out and fight—if you are too flabby for that—then stay at home. But exchange your yard measure for the straight blue steel of the rifle ; stay at home and learn to guard your girl instead of making eyes at her !

. . . . .

If you do come out and fight, and you’re

laid out early in the game with the splinter of a shell or the rip of a slim little steel bullet, we'll look after you as we are looking after your brother now, behind the firing line. Here is a snapshot—one of many that still linger in my memory—of a little scene on the coast, far away from the battle of guns, the scream of horses, and the thundering of charge upon cavalry-charge. An ambulance van is wheeled gently on to the quay. The quiet, quick-handed men with the red cross blazing on their arms—they are French doctors, these—lift the cool brown tilt of the vehicle, and peep inside. "Anglais," says one, and makes a brief note in his leather-bound book.

They lift Tommy out, lying straight and stiff on his stretcher like a dead man—Tommy scarred and battered, with a strange beard sprouting over his grey face, but his eyes eager still though he can't sing.

"Any news of the scrappin'?" says he. "Are our beggars still hanging on?"

We tell him what little we know. It is reassuring, and for these small mercies he is wonderfully thankful.

He smiles faintly; the wagon tilt falls back into its place; another huge, bearded Red Cross officer, with hands gentle as a woman's, smooths our battered friend's sweating forehead.

"Doucement, doucement!" he says; and

tenderly—oh, so tenderly—Tommy is carried over the gangway to the waiting ship.

The sea is quiet and still ; everything seems tuned to suit the needs of this wounded soldier being sent home again to England.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE FETTERED CITY

EARLY on the morning of September 8 a new order was issued from the Minister of War changing all regulations regarding the passage of motor-cars out of Paris. Regulations nobbling war correspondents were getting more and more strict. The automobile I had was allowed as far as the gates of Paris—thus far, and no farther. Double and treble lines of sentries barred the way. I drove through the Bois de Boulogne, or rather, by the outside edge of it. The gates leading into the wood were closed. It was full of sheep and cattle browsing on the grass. These quiet beasts were being guarded by sentries with drawn bayonets more carefully, perhaps, than even the inhabitants themselves. Mutton and beef would for all we know be worth their weight in gold presently.

Just outside the gates of the city the French engineers, the trench diggers, the foresters, the gardeners from the Bois, assisted by a bustling army of willing helpers, were working like niggers at the defences. The peaceful Bois had been ravished of its greenery to supply cover for the troops beyond the gates, and the gates themselves



were double guarded with heavy baulks of timber, pierced shoulder high with little arrow-slits for the convenience of the riflemen. The ramparts were being strengthened ; here, there and everywhere trenches were being dug. Across the way, the Seine from bank to bank was one wide huddle of gaily painted barges—hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of them. They too, like the Bois, were full to overflowing with food for a beleaguered city : food for mankind and fodder for horses ; barges stacked with bales of hay and bags of oats. More barges still were moving slowly along the fairway. They carried another kind of food—thousands of tins of petrol—to feed the strings of automobiles, taxicabs, Red Cross vans and provision lorries which were being rushed out, line upon line of them, to the fighting front. Such a vast commissariat was indeed heartening. It was “hastening slowly,” like the army I have previously told you of, to places beyond the city where it was most needed. The Army Service Corps was doing its work splendidly. Here was fuel for this vast engine of war—fuel and to spare for many a long day.

On my way back to try another road out of the perplexing maze of Paris I saw engineers with their magic gear at work among the girders and trceries of the Eiffel Tower. They were slinging up quick-firing guns and clamping them

down upon the balcony high over head, where in times of piping peace the Parisian lingered over his coffee and his bock. At the dizzy tower top the wireless was humming with the news of the war going on among the hills and valleys beyond the expectant city. But the wizard lady of the air was no gossipier. She was talking, truly, but with finger upon her lip. . . .

I found that it was possible to get out of Paris by train. The Germans had been flung back from their encroachment upon the further suburbs, and hour after hour as they sped northward, so mile after mile the railway line of L'Ouest was reopened, and trains were set running to the very edge of the war. This was good news indeed. Every train as it left the city was packed with people, some of them excursionists spurred by the spirit of adventure, well fortified with luncheon-baskets and bottles of wine, touring out for the day for a breath of fresh air and a peep, maybe, of the scarred roads and shattered houses which only a few hours before had marked the Prussian rout. Rout, for the time, most certainly it was.

At Noisy-le-Sec, a wide junction for the lines of the west, I found train upon train of soldiers and horses moving out, with no loss of time, to the country. Though it was blazing hot

the soldiers were all in good heart, merry and jesting as they went to war. The bulk of them were shoved off in horse-boxes, sitting among the straw with their red legs dangling over the line, smoking the eternal cigarette, singing, chaffing, eating the sweets that the girls they had left behind them had flung to them as a parting offer, and all jolly as sandboys. The horses stowed away behind them gazed out dreamily upon the unusual scene with their heads over the heads of the soldiers. As these trains moved out others steamed in full of men wounded lightly in the fierce affray beyond Lagny, and among the wooded hills and dales, in the historic hinterland of Crécy.

In one of these trains I saw the first batch of German prisoners being brought to Paris. They were Prussian officers, six of them, immured in a horse-box and guarded strictly under fixed bayonets. They looked woe-begone, scared and miserable. They were bare-headed. Their faces were ashen grey. Three of them wore spectacles, behind the glasses of which absolute terror blinked. I really believe they expected to be shot in the next half hour or so. They were taken out of their horse-box and ushered into an out-building, where they were placed behind an iron grille and left for a time on show. Admission to this temporary menagerie was a great privilege, but all those who were allowed

in made no demonstration of any kind against these pallid young men in their torn grey tunics with the shoulder-straps wrenched away, and every means of identification of their regiment destroyed. They were neither groaned at, hissed, nor spat upon, as had been the fate, so we were told, of French and English prisoners : they were treated with the utmost deference as honourable prisoners of war.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE "RED GENERAL" AT WAR

THERE was fighting in the Forest of Crécy, so I set off next day to look for it. This was hallowed ground where the Black Prince won his spurs, and French and English fought not as brothers, as they are fighting now, but as deadly foes. Nearly six hundred years ago the grey goose quill sang through the green sward ; to-day the thirteen-pounder was making very different music.

In my wanderings around the outskirts of the forest I came across—as I have already told you—three lost British soldiers. Wherever you go, hereabouts, you are bound to run into little parties of these strayed sheep, never a one of them having the remotest idea of where he is—his kit gone, his regiment lost or scattered, but himself a Merry Andrew of war—a troubadour trusting to sheer luck to pull him through.

Of such a kidney were my three—the three Manchesters, utterly, absolutely, and most cheerfully lost, apparently for ever. I found them squatting on a tree trunk, playing chuck-halfpenny (or rather chuck-centime) into an upturned German helmet. They had been

fighting hard for four weeks, and their tales were rich and rare, and most gloriously confused.

“We’ve been padding the hoof for years and years and years and donkey’s years,” said one of them. “Our ’earts are all right, but our ’oofs are as raw as steaks ——”

Well, I managed to find them a boat—a sort of mixture of Thames wherry and Norfolk fishing punt—and, taking turns at the sculls, we voyaged along the river, with no more adventure than an occasional conflict with a dead horse, safely to Lagny. We sat up and gasped at Lagny. It is a biggish town, built half on one side of the river (here twenty feet deep) and half on the other, and joined up by a massive steel bridge. The town was now completely split in two by the hatchet of dynamite.

The British cavalry had ridden through the day before on a hot Uhlan chase. They had left a handful of Engineers behind to blow up the bridge. “If we can’t go forward, then we can’t come back,” said they, cheerfully enough. “Up with the bridge, boys—good-bye!” They clattered off in a whirl of dust.

“Bang!” the bridge was shattered to smithereens, and so were the roof, the chimneys, and windows of the Hôtel du Pont de Fer on one side of the river and the neat little millinery establishment of Mdlle. Renée on the other. The inhabitants, crowding at a respectable

distance on either bank, looked on aghast. Five minutes later came through the order from headquarters :

*It is not necessary to blow up bridge, enemy well on the run.*

Hard lines for Lagny ! But war is war, and bridges do not count in such times. Besides, the news was good news ; the enemy was on the run ; and bridges, like breeches, can be repaired. . . .

I left Lagny to take care of itself, to join itself together at its leisure ; and further uneventful journeying brought me unchallenged and quite comfortably into the restful valley of the Grand Morin. Farther and farther eastward I rode, until at last, in the full blaze of noon, I saw ahead the white dust whirling at the end of a ribbon of road, and a string of London General buses ripping along, stacked inside and out with "yards" of good wholesome French bread, bales of cheeses, quantities of cabbages, and various other masses of comforting stuff.

Dust and dirt and battle bruises had played havoc with most of these vehicles, and daubs of brown paint, slapped on anyhow, had taken the shine out of them, but I saw one of them with "No. 58" still proudly flaunting overhead, and greeted it as an old friend which had, no doubt, carried me in pre-mobilization days to

my own door in Maida Vale. Its blushing glory had departed. It was no longer the proud and shining Red General. Its top hamper, seats and all, had been ripped off, its windows had vanished, and their place had been taken by sheets of that perforated zinc with which meat safes are covered. There were no advertisements visible, but the brass bell still remained over the driver's head, and the string of it dangled behind. The conductor had vanished with the advertisements.

The sensation was extraordinary. Surely it was a dream, and I pinched myself hard. The dream stayed; more buses swung and jolted by. And next, a detachment of French cavalry riding with loose rein, with the long tails of their splendid horses flicking a good-bye-for-the-present message to the city far behind, all speeding north-east, where, under a black sullen cloud, trembling with heaven's artillery, tumult of another kind raged.

We were not retreating this time. Somewhere beyond the cloud, pierced now and again with livid streaks of flame, the German right was rolling back.

A French officer of Cuirassiers rode up, spied my civilian garb, and wanted to know my business there. I pulled out from my grimy shirt a small library of passports, *permis de*



*sejour*, and other vised documents, and the officer laughed merrily and shook hands.

"*Anglais!*" said he. "Ha! Come along. It's all right. We have turned them; we are at last chasing them. This is our first stage to Berlin!" Off he rode like a whirlwind. He was glad and jolly, and so were the French Tommies as they swung along, burnt black as cinders, their tongues hanging out, their beards powdered with L.G.O.C. dust, but their hearts aflame.

I learnt from these soldiers that since the day before the German right had been driven five and twenty miles up the valley of the Marne, and that it was still retreating. And watching that significant cloud ahead one could see it plainly enough.

Just beyond one of the picturesque little villages where they make the succulent Brie cheeses when they're not fighting for the glory of France, I ran across a little camp of ten nigger-faced British soldiers. They were Royal Horse Artillery boys—all that remained of a hundred of them, fifty horse artillery and fifty field artillery drivers, whose job since they left Southampton with 500 battery horses was to supply remounts for the gunners. The other ninety have vanished, but the remaining ten, under the fathering of a freckled, mutton-fisted sergeant, were cheery enough. Days and days

ago they had lost all their kit, they had got nothing except the clothes they stood up in, and they hadn't seen a saddle since they left port in the Bay of Biscay, where they landed their horses.

“ For weeks,” said the sergeant, “ we've been riding<sup>4</sup> barebacked, with a couple of horses each to look after, like a blooming tournament show at Olympia. We've had a dickens of a time and no glory—just bunging in spare battery horses when others have been shot. Hot work ? By gum ! Blazing hot, and not a weapon among the lot of us, save our pocket-knives and the rifles we pick up.

“ We're off to Longchamps to pick up some more gee-gees. Have you any idea of the road there ? We don't know where we are. This might be Timbuctoo, for all we know ! ”

Having seen the horse gunners—or all that was left of them—on their way to Longchamps, and taking the Maida Vale omnibus dust for a guide, I moved on into the Marne Valley. A combined rush of French and British cavalry had smashed into a patrol of German cavalry, and had utterly demolished them on the outskirts of the small wood just beyond —. Here a battery of our own Royal Horse Artillery, with half their men and half their horses gone, did splendid work screened by a few forest trees they had cut down.

A hundred yards ahead a small stream flowed, and beyond that the German artillery was posted. A big thunderstorm was rolling up, and in the gloom of it the artillery duel went on.

The gunners were directed and the range found for them by a Bleriot aeroplane, which circled round high overhead, out of the range of rifle fire. As soon as the range is once found these guns can go ahead with no further trouble, for the recoil is worked on a buffer system and the wheels do not move an inch. On the other hand, the German field guns opposed to our crowd here were all fitted with the old spade contraption, which necessitated continual re-lighting and much loss of time. Their shooting was good whenever they found the range, but it was not a patch on ours, and just as the thunderstorm burst we had them either smashed up or on the run—absolutely demoralized.

In this fight, the fight of the thunderstorm, we captured a number of prisoners, horse and foot. They were tired and done, and they admitted that they had not the stomach to face the charges of the British cavalry.

The storm which burst at the tail end of this fight in the Marne Valley was a sousing drencher. Both French and English soldiers stripped off their tunics and shirts and absolutely revelled in a glorious shower-bath. Many of the men

stood stark naked in the downpour. A most amazing sight they looked—black as niggers from the rim of their hats to the rim of their collars, and the rest of them snow white in comparison.

This was the finest refresher they had had since the start of the war—this and the glad, the glorious news that the Germans were retreating up the valley, and following the snake-like meanderings of the placid Marne. But theirs was no meander. It was a tumultuous retreat; and our soldiers, slamming on their clothes over their wet skins, were after them in next to no time, hot foot and all aglow.

I was told en route many tales of German brutality to the wounded. By the lych-gate of a little church in the village of St. Just, a party of Uhlans came across a Belgian soldier with his left arm very nearly shot away. He was lying exhausted by the roadside, spent with pain and loss of blood.

Instead of succouring him the German soldiers taunted him and then bayoneted him six times in the shoulders and the side. Then they rode off, leaving him for dead, but he managed to crawl along the road for a mile, leaving a trail of blood behind him. Here he was found by half-a-dozen wandering soldiers, who bandaged him up with strips from their own shirts and carried him to safety. A draught of red wine



pulled him round, and to-day he is still alive to tell the tale!

I believe that these plucky, tough little Belgians can stand anything. They are not men of flesh and blood—they are amazing stalwarts of steel.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE BECKONING HAND

MILES and miles and miles of desolation ! Wherever one moves in this war-swept valley of the Marne, only a few days ago so peaceful and so beautiful, one meets with the same piteous sight—Nature, like Niobe, all tears, wringing her hands at the mad and merciless deeds of her children.

The country here is very like my own native valley of the Ouse, in Huntingdonshire, the sky is a serene blue, flecked with fleeces of tender white cloud. In the water meadows the cattle—all that is left of them—still stand knee-deep in the lush grass ; the evening breeze still makes music in the willows which bend over the stream with their silver leaves tinkling ; but all the birds have vanished—gone, Heaven knows where, out of this shattering tumult.

Under the serene blue of a summer sky an uncanny silence reigns. The world is holding her breath, shocked, terrified !

The writhing flame has sped over this sweet country, leaving it seared and scorched. The slow waters of the Marne are no longer blue with Heaven's soft reflection on a summer day,

but livid and dreadfully malodorous with the swollen bodies of dead horses, hundreds and hundreds of them—aye, and of men too. In a quiet bend of the river, where the water runs clear in the shallows, the tall reeds lean over and, in the morning breeze, seem to whisper affrightedly one to another. In the shadow of them, half buried in the mud and ooze, a dead horse lies, saddled and bridled, with a gaping, jagged wound in its throat. It is a cavalry horse: horse and rider are still here, comrades in death, as they were only yesterday brothers in life, dashing full tilt to death or glory on the wings of the morning. The stirrup-leather is stretched out tight. The foot of the rider is still in it, jammed hard and fast—a slim, small, elegant little foot, high booted, carefully laced. . . . Deeper still in the water, as the sun strikes upon it, I can recognize the smart uniform of the Chasseur—the gentleman-rider of the Guard. . . .

I have neither the heart nor the pen to tell of these ghastly scenes.

A blind man could follow the track of this battle-storm easily enough. And I have floundered along it until I am sick. The fire is still smouldering over the shallow graves of the dead—the brave dead, entombed so hurriedly that one sees here and there in these gruesome cemeteries a brown hand thrust through the

shovelled earth as if beckoning ; the hump of a shoulder, tunic, and shoulder-strap torn away. . . . It is dreadful. Think of it, if you can ! For over a hundred miles behind the battle-line these burying grounds mark the scenes of carnage.



## CHAPTER XIV

### A HUMAN DOCUMENT

ONE warm, thirsty afternoon found me wandering aimlessly along the empty, dusty "High Street" of the small village of Crécy-en-Brie. Most of the houses here, as in other villages round about, were shuttered and desolate. The street was littered with rubbish. Half-starved woe-begone cats lay in the sun, sleeping in pitiable attitude of dejection. Presently an English Tommy, a hefty curly-headed chap, with his forage cap stuck jauntily on the back of his head, came along out of an alley-way carrying a French baby on his broad shoulder—talking British nonsense to the wide-eyed brat.

"Hullo!" said he, "You're British! Glory Hallelujah! Come to the Green Dragon—that's the English for the bloomin' pub down the street—the only place in this God-forsaken hole where you can get a tiddley; and that nothing but rum. But not so bad!"

He piloted me to the Dragon Vert, and there, squatting on a bench in the little sanded bar-parlour, we found six other khaki fighting men of the Fourth Ammunition Column, Third Section, Royal Field Artillery. They had a

camp of spare battery horses out amid the trees at the other end of the village ; they had wandered aimlessly across the country from the coast with what they called their " spare-parts."

" Rotten business," said my friend, when he had set the baby down at the Green Dragon's hospitable door, and told it to toddle home. " Rotten business. All graft and no glory."

" No fighting ? " I asked.

" Lord, yes ; any amount. Hot as blazes too. But we had a dam'd sight too much to do in looking after our 'orses to be able to enjoy the scrappin' properly. Our attention was took off the business. Our string of thorobreds—thorobreds, I *don't* think—took colic, and took it bad. And what with looking after their stummicks, pore beggars, and writin' up my diary which I'd promised the missus faithful I'd do, I've had no time for anything else, so to speak. He unbuttoned the flap of the breast pocket in his tunic and pulled out a penny washing-book.

" If you'd like to cast your optic through it, sir, you're welcome."

I not only cast my optic through it ; I found it a document so human that I craved Driver Thatcher's permission to copy it out.

" There ain't time, sir. There's stacks and stacks of it—Gawd knows the time it took me to write it all out. But I'll read it to you, if

you like, so as you can get the hang of it. I've got to go and water the 'orses in half an hour. . . ."

So he read it out, word for word, with all the pride of authorship shining in his honest, smudgy face. Here it is. I would not alter a line or word of it for worlds. It tells, with sublime nonchalance, of the worries and troubles of Driver Thatcher, Royal Field Artillery, during that tantalizing time when his string of spare-parts took the colic. That was all he cared about. Hell was thundering about his ears, shells were screaming, death riding riot. Driver Thatcher brushes all that away with impatience. How to stop that dam'd colic . . . that's the thing that matters.

"Troops moving toward France. Well, we started off from Hendon . . . . ., to entrain at Park Royal, and we got to Southampton about two o'clock next morning. Got horses on board all right, though the friskiest of them kicked a lot. . . . Got to Havre safe. Good passage and quick. My little lot camped in a village outside the town. Nice little house us four had, but the back premises was rather stinky. They mostly are in this country. Food good—rabbit and potatoes and plenty of beer, not our English sort, but the colour of cyder. Us four enjoyed ourselves with the family, and

had a good time, and left ten o'clock next day well filled up.

“ Our objective was a place called Compiègne, on the Ouse. We marched off from Ham Somme about seven o'clock on the 25th; left three dead horses lying on the road. We got through all right, watering our horses on the way from pumps and taps at private houses. The people were awful kind, giving us quantities of pears, and filling our water-bottles with beer. That was all right. Our welcome was splendid everywhere. The people in the houses came out and cheered and gave us plain chocolate, fruit, and beer, and several other items.

“ At Compiègne we got into touch with the Germans. Very hot work. All our guns in action all round, and the people of the villages flocking in a pannick towards Paris. It made us feel downhearted what we saw here.

“ We marched from Compiègne about eleven o'clock on the 30th, which was Sunday. Our way was through a pretty little village, where the people tore down the heavy laden branches of the damson trees and sent us off munching the fruit and very cheerful. The way was hard. Terrible steep hills, which knocked our older and weaker horses. Collick (colic) broke out among them, too, and that was bad. We lost a good many and had to leave them dead or dying alongside of the road.



“ We got within six hours of Paris when the Germans surprised us and drove us back. We skooted quick and dodged them in the dark until one o'clock in the morning, when we lay on the roadside, men and horses together, fagged out. Slept until 5 A.M. and then marched on again, still retreating. Hot as hell it was. Nothing to eat or drink. Plenty of tea, but nothing to boil it with. At last we got some dry biscuits and some tins of marmalade. Bill Thompson, whose teeth were bad, went near mad with toothache after the jam. But toothache is better than starvation, any-way. . . .

“ We marched through Ralentir and Pierreponds. (*Note.* Though Mr. Thatcher is very careful to note down names and dates, it is not to be wondered at that he occasionally makes little slips, due more, perhaps, to ignorance of the puzzling French language than anything else. ‘ Ralentir,’ which he mentions here is, of course, no town at all ; signposts bearing that word are to be met with along most of the main roads. ‘ Ralentir ’ is a warning to motorists that there is danger ahead. It means, literally, ‘ go slow.’) Food on the way—apples and water. Now we make our way through the woods toward the ferry. No dead horses, thank God, to-day. I hope we have checked that — collick, but my horse fell into a ditch

going through the wood and could not get out for over an hour. I couldn't go for help, because the Germans had got the range of the place and their shells were ripping overhead like blazes.

"Poor old Dick (the horse), he was that fagged out by the long march. At last I got him out and went on, and by luck managed to pick up my pals.

"The woods were twenty-three miles long. We thought we should never get out—they seemed everlasting. It was night and moonshine when we at last got to Satiness Satuern (?). We are all stoney broke, having had no money since we left Southampton, which seems years and years.

"At 4 A.M. next morning we got to Reary and right into the middle of it, with our tired horses and us tireder still—nothing to eat and dry as bones. The Germans were lambing in at us with their artillery, and poor old Dick got blowed up. I thank God I wasn't on him just then. . . .

"Half the horses of L Battery, Royal Artillery, got smashed, and we had to bung in our poor old tired ones to fill up. Only a few gunners were left, but they stood by firing on still and singing 'Onwards, Christian Soldiers.' Then the Germans charged, and our gunners did a bunk, but not before they had drove spikes into

the guns so as to make them useless to the enemy. They said they guessed they would get them back in a day or two, and if they did they could repair them easy enough. The Germans don't know these tricks, and we can do them down any time.

" *September 1.* The battle still going on very fierce. . . . (No more is said about the fight, for 'collick' among the horses has again broken out, and our gallant driver is much more troubled about that, and the job he has in stopping it, than the actual fighting.)

" *September 2.* More fighting and worser than ever. I don't believe we shall ever get to Paris. . . . Now we come to Montagny, and fighting all the time. Rabbits and apples to eat gallore, but still no money, and no good if we had, because we can't spend it. We've got nothing to smoke, so we are not 'alf happy, I don't think! We have also captured a lot of German horses, mostly officers' chargers, which have galloped into our lines. I supposes the officers are corpses. I stopped one, and found a yellow packet of French cigars in one of the saddlebags. It wasn't half all right, I tell you.

" *September 3.* We progressed this day four miles in twelve hours. Took the wrong road, and had to crawl about the woods on our stummoks like snakes to dodge the German

snipers. We had one rifle between four of us, and took it in turns to have goes. We shot one blighter and took another prisoner. They was both half starved and covered with soars. Then the rifle jammed and we had nothing to defend ourselves with.

“At last we found the main body again. They wanted more horses, and we were just bringing them up and putting them to the guns when a German areyplane came over us and flue round pretty low. The troops tried to fetch him down, and some bullets went through the wings, but then he got too high. We were still letting go at him from the low trees where we was laying when we suddenly found out his game. He got up higher and dropped a bomb in the middle of us, but it exploded very weak and nobody was hurt.

“Next day we started on a night march, and got to Lagny Thorigny, and camped outside the town, where the people fed us on rabbits again. I said I was sick of rabbits, and me and Bill Thompson walked acrost to a farmhouse and borrowed three chickens, which we cooked. It was fine. They wasn't tuff as you might expect, because Bill knowed the dodge. If you kill a chicken and cook it straight away before it is cold, it is as tender as anythink. Bill knows a lot of dodges like that, and he is a usefull chap to be with on the march. At



Lagny Thorigny we heard good news and found that the guns of the L Battery had been taken back from the Germans by the Thirty-second Brigade Royal Field Artillery.

“ Outside Lagny there was more fierce fighting—twenty miles of it—and the Germans were shot down like birds. We got in another hot corner, and managed to get out just in time, after mending the L Battery guns, which had been spiked by our chaps two minutes before the Germans collared them. We had just left our camp and some wagons there, when the German shells fell into it and blew it all to bits.

“ *September 3 (continued)*. Firing is still going on, but it is not so fierce, though scouts have come in and told us there are 10,000 Germans round us this day. To-night I got two ounces of Navy Cut. It was prime.

“ *September 4*. We marched from camp at 5.30 P.M. and kept on marching until three in the morning. . . .

“ *September 8*. We are marching on further away from Paris. We shall never get there, I guess. And no more will the Germans if me and Bill knows anythink.

“ *September 11*. Marching to Crécy. Passing hundreds of bodies lying about like rotten sheep. We are behind the main army now, but can hear the guns going.

“ *September 12*. In the village of Crécy

Plenty of food and houses to sleep into. Here we have got to stay until further orders. Collick still very bad. But the rum at the publick house very good. I hope it will last our time."

Here, for the time, I will leave Driver Thatcher, of the Royal Field Artillery, and Bill Thompson, that crafty borrower of chickens, and the rest of these careless wanderers of war, who love their horses beyond all things, and do not care a jot for screaming shell and battering shrapnel so long as their "spare-parts" are snug and safe and well out of the way of the racket.

We shake hands on the well-worn doorstep of the Green Dragon; Mr. Thatcher carefully buttons the flap of his pocket over his precious washing-book.

"Cheer-o!" says he.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE BATTLE OF THE WALKING WOOD

THE way along which I set out for the Forest of Crécy was trampled flat by the passage of hastening soldiery. Here had the artillery thundered by leaving hoof marks by the hundred and thousand, and horses dead and dying in all manner of horrible attitudes. There is scant time for mercy toward these poor dumb beasts. The sight of the wounded ones strikes a pang to my heart. They lie there by the roadside under the flaming, pitiless eye of the sun, their necks stretched out, their nostrils bloody. One poor thing raises its head as I pass, and the look in its sad, sad eyes haunts me in my sleep still. "For mercy's sake," it seems to say, "put me out of my misery. . . ."

The road was scored deep by the wheels of the heavy guns ; the flotsam and jetsam of war lay thick around. A peasant showed the way to the forest, and when at last I struck it, lo ! it was a forest no longer, but an amazing scatterment of tree trunks.

"Ah, the beautiful forest !" said my guide. "It is beautiful no longer. Its music is mute ;

the birds will no longer sing in its groves. The forest of Crécy has been guillotined ! ”

The ravished trees stood there stiff and stark, decapitated—and still (one could almost imagine) bleeding at the neck. What had happened was this :

A few days back the French and English, in overwhelming numbers, had poured in from Lagny in the great ensemble toward the Marne to reinforce the flanking skirmishes that were already going on. Ahead were the Germans, in ever-increasing hordes, stiffening their battalions, bringing up their guns, rallying their cavalry, for a forlorn hope to carry the Marne and to hurl themselves into Paris. To turn this we were, luckily enough, in time.

One of the smaller woods to the south-east of Crécy was already held by the enemy. But although the wood was cover for a time for them it also was confusion most confounding. In the night our patrols, greatly daring, smelt them out and carried back news of their whereabouts to the cavalry on one side and the infantry on the other.

Incautiously enough, the Germans were moving about the Bois with stable lanterns to guide them, unaware that trouble was so near. And that did for them. Suddenly they found their twinkling glow-worms a mark for a foe of whose proximity they were blissfully unaware.



They were smitten woefully, hip and thigh. A midnight hailstorm from our maxims suddenly screamed through the sleeping trees. The rifle fire, too, was excellent. Our men don't blaze away at random at an invisible target nowadays.

Next morning scores of lanterns were picked up in the wood with their glasses shattered and their reservoirs pierced.

A yelling, hallooing cavalry charge finally cleared this tragic little wood. Our losses were slight, but the Germans suffered severely.

Twenty of the prisoners who had been taken in this *mélée* were herded together in a clearing. Their rifles were not taken away from them, but stacked near by. In a rash moment they got the idea into their heads that they were but loosely guarded.

They made a combined rush for their rifles. . . .  
They will never make another.

. . . . .

Now—back to the forest of Crécy for a moment. When I saw it on the day of my visit, and found what had happened and heard the story afresh—told with many a twang of rich Lancashire humour from the lips of three lost British soldiers whom I met there—the book of my memory opened at the

tragedy of Macbeth, and I read again, and with a peculiar relish, the moving act of Dunsinane.

The day before, I was scuttling along in a sort of tearing nightmare in the wake of Maida Vale motor-buses—"Pickford's Light Horse"—tooting along with tucker for our fighters, shedding their supplies, and easing up behind the firing line what time the R.A.M.C. were converting them with extraordinary speed and completeness into swift and comfortable ambulance vans for the wounded, to carry them back behind the lines out of harm's way. Up above, among the wreathing clouds, our Bleriot's and our steadier Nestors of the air, the biplanes, were hawking heaven and telling our gunners by quick, sure signals where to plant their shells. This was the new strategy marking the plunging moments of Armageddon.

. . . . .

A few hours pass. A curtain of thunderstorm is drawn black and menacing over the scene; the aeroplanes have vanished; the motor-buses have swung off westward with the wounded, and we are flung back across the centuries to schemes and scenes of mediæval warfare. The forest of Crécy is the wood of Birnam. Maybe from the tower of some still-standing château a modern Macbeth looks out with startled eyes

from under his black helmet to see the trees of Crécy walking !

This is how it was done ; done in the morning mist which shrouded trenches and trees and made dim spectres of the flitting soldiery. French and British alike—swarms of them—set about the wood with axes and knives and saws, and even sabres, and had a wide area of it down in next to no time. Line after line of infantry, each man armed with a thickly-foliaged branch, moved forward in close order towards the enemy, whilst behind, amid the lopped tree trunks, our artillery fixed themselves with their machine-guns and the very business-like 13-pounders to cover the “ wood ” as it moved forward all a rustle.

The attack which followed—rapid, fierce, and as bold as anything that has been done in this huge campaign—won all the success it merited. It came off trumps.

The mysterious, slow moving wood soon showed that there was more than umbrage in the texture of it. It snarled flame and spat bullets, whilst overhead the shells of the French and British artillery sped screaming to their mark.

But one incident nearly upset the whole show. Just under the ridge of a hill to the right of the forest large quantities of our own ammunition were piled ready for sudden service

and (apparently) well screened and out of harm's way. The on-coming French cavalry, making a detour for purposes of their own, struck the hill and rode along it for some distance. For a few minutes, and a few minutes only, they showed themselves on the sky-line. In the bright sunshine there was no mistaking the vivid scarlet of the breeches stripe against the green background, and the flash of the white, long-tailed stallions they are so fond of riding, and they were spotted at once by the German artillery.

The Kaiser's batteries—the pick of the bunch were here—lost no time in finding the range.

Presently the shells began to drop thick and fast over the ridge, falling so near to our precious ammunition as to make the situation remarkably unpleasant. But the British soldier was up to that, as he is up to everything in this campaign.

Little parties of our boys swarmed up the hill, stripped to the waist, and set about lugging the great heavy boxes out of the way of disaster and explosion.

My soldiers three (they are Manchester men) were in this, and they tell me that it was the hottest, the flamingest corner they ever had been in. They came through it unscathed—so did our ammunition. But it was more by good luck than anything else.



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By evening the enemy had been repulsed, the Marne was clear of them, and the fight was rolling farther and farther away east of the French capital.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE SACK OF SENLIS

THE cry of the chase is alluring, fascinating, irresistible ! Hounds full pelt after the Prussian fox ; scent breast-high, and a dazzling morning of sunshine to hunt in !

Out of Paris on the pearly dawn—a straggler perhaps in the chase, but not so very far behind. The road is long and straight through a mighty avenue of tall trees. Here and there hailstorms of shrapnel have torn the branches to tatters and leaves lie thick along the road. There are graves, too, by the roadside marking the shock, at various vantage-points, of yesterday's tumult. These graves are common objects of the countryside, no more to be remarked than molehills. Here and there, where the highway forks to right or left, there is a pile of turf four or five feet high, and strengthened by hastily hewn logs of wood, and behind it a sort of prehistoric dwelling, roughly thatched and with just a rabbit-hole for a doorway. Out of this hermitage a sentry leaps waving his long thin bayonet.

“ Your business, m'sieur ! ”

I show my pass, the soldier shakes hands, and off I go again under the tall trees, in the

tallest of which I have time to observe out of the corner of my eye a snug little nest—three battle-roosters, perched high in the umbrage, their red legs dangling from the bough, their bayonets blinking in the sunlight. . . .

And then, for a full hour, there is no sign of war anywhere, but perfect peace: miles of apple-trees along the roadside, laden with fruit ripening rosily in the sun; a sweet little stream trickling along merrily, women at work in the fields, singing; a milkmaid sitting at her business under the lee of a lazy red cow; a pretty farmhouse in the background with a cock, gaily plumaged, strutting in the yard and lording it over the obedient hens—indeed all the delightful rural ingredients for the House that Jack Built!

Then, swiftly, a swing in the road, a dip downward, the flash of a tall white château mirrored in the lake under the trees, a rustic bridge spanning the stream, and suddenly we are among the outskirts of a town. There is an acrid smell of burning in the air. An old peasant woman, her apron loaded with bread, meets us, and we ask what town is this.

“It is no town at all, m’sieurs,” she replies drearily, “though yesterday it was. It is a ruin—the ruin of Senlis. The Germans—ah!” (she spits upon the ground)—“the Germans were here until yesterday—here for three days,

burning, pillaging, ravishing, rioting. Then, in the afternoon, there was an alarm, a wild fight in the smoking streets, and they fled with their craven tails between their legs! A wonderful fight, sirs! Go into the town and you will hear more of it!"

The town smelt like a twitch-fire on an autumn evening. It was an amazing, terrifying ruin. Every house but one in the two main streets, the Faubourg St. Martin and the Rue de la République, was burnt out, every roof tumbled in, the windows gaping and black and still smoking; coarse jests scribbled in chalk on the scorched walls, with caricatures coarser still to illustrate them; litter of broken bottles, crockery ware, furniture, shattered pictures, cradles, clocks, ironmongery, bolsters, bedsteads, clothing burnt and blood-stained; litter indescribable! The one house in the principal street to remain untouched was the Hôtel du Grand Cerf, the leading hotel of the town: why it escaped was because the German officers chose it as their headquarters during their stay. The hotel was still open—I entered. In the wide hall I met the landlady—a tall handsome woman with black hair and eyes and a tongue eloquent of the tragedy she had just passed through.

"Have you anything to eat?" I asked, for I was hungry.

"Nothing, m'sieur, but six small tins of



sardines and three bottles of champagne. The sardines were left behind by the Germans. The champagne is all that remains of nearly two thousand bottles in our cellars. I hid six bottles under the counter. . . .”

There was bread and there was butter too, and a trifle of Gruyère cheese. The simple meal was spread in the large deserted dining-hall, and the landlady, as she attended upon my déjeuner, told me her tale.

“Three days ago,” said she, “the German soldiers rode into Senlis. Soldiers? They wore uniforms of grey, and spiked, black helmets, and carried guns; but they were not soldiers. They were roysterers—Bacchanals, m’sieur. Half of them, I declare, were already drunk. Two officers went to the château of the mayor, dragged him out, and declared that as they entered the town a young man had fired upon them. There was only one penalty for that. The mayor was brought out and placed against the wall of his house together with two of our principal citizens, M. Simond and M. Barbère, and the three of them, brave, unflinching, noble—the three of them were shot dead! I witnessed it, m’sieur, from this very window by which you are sitting! There is the wall; you can see it by just turning your head. Those splashes on the plaster, those bruises, are the marks made by the bullets. H

“The officer in charge of the firing party called to some of the citizens standing trembling by. He pointed to the corpses of the mayor and M. Simond and M. Barbère. He spurned them with his boot. ‘Take this offal away and bury it,’ said he. And it was done.”

The landlady opened another tin of sardines, placed them on the table, and went on with her story.

“Then followed other things. The Prussian officers and some of their men marched to the cathedral and from it they brought all the candles, all the tapers, they could find. Then they formed a regiment of the inhabitants. ‘Now march,’ said they, ‘along the streets of the town, open all the windows and doors of your houses.’ This they did, wondering what it might mean. ‘And now,’ said their cruel masters, ‘turn again and march again—this time to the fields beyond the town. Bring hay from the haystacks, bring the ripe corn from the cornfields—each an armful, as much as you can carry.’

“This again they did. And coming back into the town, they were commanded to pile the hay and the corn within their houses. This was done with great care so that not a house in the main street of Senlis was missed. The citizens were marched along in military order; behind them marched the Germans with the

candles and the tapers from the cathedral now lighted. They marched along with candle in one hand and a bottle of champagne—my champagne, m'sieur!—in the other, and as the hay and the corn were distributed into the houses they tossed the flaming candles one by one into the open windows until presently the town, our beloved town, was a hell of furious flame. . . .”

“ . . . There is still some coffee left, m'sieur ; but, alas, no cognac. I will make the coffee and then you shall hear the rest of the story. . . .”

“ The officers and many of the demons who were with them billeted themselves upon me in this hotel. They wrote their names in the visitors' book—here it is : I have kept it as a relic of their raid—they made me get out all my best sheets, prepare the rooms, boil gallons of water for hot baths, and serve the best meals at my command. They raided the cellars below and brought in from them eighteen hundred and twenty bottles of champagne. They ate and they drank ; they made beasts of themselves. . . . One of the officers surprised my little daughter on the stairway. ‘ You are too young——’ he said. But I desire a memento of this pleasant visit. What hangs upon the little silver chain you are wearing at your throat ? ’

“ It was a medallion of the Virgin. The

Prussian tore it away from the shrinking child and fastened it round his own gross throat. 'This,' he said—and he spoke French well enough, as did many of them—'will be a memory to me of Senlis—Senlis and a pretty maid!'

"In the afternoon of the Thursday, which was yesterday, the tables were turned. A whirlwind of soldiers came into the town—avenging angels. The little Zouaves dashed in, in taxicabs, hundreds and hundreds of them; three in the cab and one on the roof; they dashed in and drove the Germans out. It was a fierce fight and bloody, but soon over. Beyond the town there was carnage. In a farm scarcely a mile away, two hundred and fifty Germans are lying dead. In the next village there are two hundred more alive, and prisoners in another form, guarded only by two wounded French soldiers and three English. Five to two hundred, m'sieur! But the five are brave men. The two hundred are pigs—drunken pigs!"



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LUNCHEON HOUR

#### *From my Diary*

*Sunday.*—Paris. Scene, the Café ——, Avenue de l'Opéra. Many of the epicures have returned, with tremendous bravery, to the scenes of their past triumphs. Paris, serenely smiling, welcomes them back, and spreads her treasures and her truffles at their feet. . . .

“Garçon—the hors d'œuvres !” The waiter brings up a wide, flat tray divided off into twelve compartments and flanked by a huge jar of *paté*. In the compartments are every kind of choice tit-bits—anchovies, sardines, herrings, potato salad, crevettes, &c. &c. Crisp, warm rolls, fresh, sweet Normandy butter, snowy napery, tall sparkling glasses, clatter of knives and forks, popping of corks, sizzle of syphons, flow and gurgle of wine, red and white. Monsieur's plate is piled with *paté de fois gras*. His napkin is tucked under his chin. His eyes shine. He settles down to it.

“These shrimps are excellent, ma foi!—excellent. Just a few—a dozen or so . . . ah ! . . . And now for lunch ! But the man who misses the hors d'œuvre at the Café —— is a

fool, mon ami ! He does not know what is good for his soul ! ”

#### IN SHATTERED SENLIS

*Monday.*—On the wide steps of the beautiful cathedral. The town shattered and still smoking. An acrid smell taints the atmosphere. The sun streams down, hot and blazing, upon the little gathering of the General Staff of the French army. They are seated around upturned empty cases of motor essence, in drawing-room chairs rescued from the loot of the mayor's beautiful chalet. White table-cloths are spread over the motor-essence cases. There are napkins, too, folded carefully into the semblance of a bishop's mitre.

A young lieutenant marches up the cathedral steps. His arms are loaded with provender—a yard of bread, three bottles of Rhine wine which the German officers left behind in their sudden flight from the town (they are now lying dead and still unburied in a horrible farmhouse four miles away), four tins of sardines, and a slab of Gruyère cheese wrapped up in an old copy of “*La Guerre Sociale.*” His arms and hands thus burdened, he cannot salute the general, but he clicks his spurred heels together and bows stiffly. . . .

“ You will join us in our déjeuner, Lieut. ———? ”

“Merci, mon General —, but I have already lunched!” He gazes hungrily upon the meagre though tempting fare as he deposits it upon the table-cloth, salutes, and marches down again into the gloomy town.

As the déjeuner proceeds in stately ceremony women and girls, pale, wide-eyed and wondering, and all dressed in black from head to heel, mount the steps, pass trembling by the bright uniforms, and steal through the great west door of the lonely fane to pray for the souls of their dead.

#### FOREST OF COMPIÈGNE

*Tuesday.*—The French column is marching through the glades absolutely noiselessly, except for the complaining creak of the big wheels of the ammunition wagons. The Zouaves—well-nigh two thousand of them—are swinging along in fours at the head of the column. As we move northward under the whispering trees I talk to one of their officers—a tall, slim, young man, with the dark, dreamy eyes of a poet, eyes which seem to be gazing far, far away, and a voice soft and musical.

“There,” says he, pointing to the head of the line, “are marching the two hundred heroes of the red taxicabs. When Senlis was still burning and the enemy were dancing like gnomes in the

red light, my Zouaves, in the little crimson autos whirled gaily into the town, surprised the ravishers, slaughtered many of them, and drove the rest into the woods. They caught the colonel sleeping in the château of M. Simond (whom he had shot), and chased him naked, except for his shirt, through the park. He hid in a drain, but they found him. . . .”

The story stops here. From the head of the column comes the sharp word “Halt!” It travels down the line as far as my lieutenant. “Halt!” says he in almost a whisper of that girlish voice of his, and the next moment the Zouaves have stacked their rifles, eased their pilgrim packs, and are sprawling on the soft grass by the roadside.

In twos and threes they crawl off into the woods, wriggling into the undergrowth like snakes. Half human cries are heard amid the shadows, and presently out into the glade again come the brown-faced, wire-bearded little warriors each with a pheasant in his grip. The plucking and the roasting are soon done. The smell of the rich brown flesh is very sweet. Red wine from the water bottles washes the feast down. A cigarette, a snooze, and then. . . .

“Attention!” and the quick word to march. The column closes in and swings on again. Over the red fez dances the plume of a cock pheasant’s tail feather. We are not satisfied with breaking



Nature's laws in this great game of war. We must break the game laws as well.

. . . . .

### THE VILLAGE OF PENCHARD

*Wednesday.*—Not a house stands. Even the village gardens have been swept empty by the passing hurricane. An old, old woman, one of the few left from the fury (because she was too old), staggers and gropes half blindly along the rubbish-scattered street. We offer her money and a kindly word. She flings the money down and stamps upon it with her clogged feet.

“Money!” she screams. “What can I do with money in this empty wilderness? For the love of God, give me bread. . . . I am starving!”

. . . . .

### PLAY UP, ARSENAL!

*Thursday.*—The railway siding at Noisy-le-Sec. Thomas Atkins of the R.F.A. ammunition column sitting happily on a truss of hay. Remounts in the background nibbling the same. Thomas fights his tin of bully-beef with a blunt sardine-opener. He digs out a lump and hands it to me on the end of the blade. Very filling, but dry. I produce my thermos. Out comes the cork with a pop. The coffee, made at dawn, steams hot and aromatic. “What!” says Tommy. “Cawfee—’ot cawfee. Sounds too

good to be true. Thanks—I don't mind if I do. . . . And now, sir, have you such a thing as an English newspaper about you? We've had no news of anything anywhere for years and years." I produce a crumpled copy of the *Daily News* and hand it to him. He turns the sheets hurriedly. War—war—war; columns and columns of war. Little or nothing else. So he hands the paper back sadly.

"I wanted to see what the Arsenal is doing," says the soldier. "Where's the sporting page?"

"Shot away in the war!" I reply.

"Well, I'm blowed!" says Tommy. "What a war it is to be sure!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### HOW WE BROUGHT THE GLAD NEWS

“WE are going forward,” said the French cavalry officer, “to drive the Germans out of Compiègne. A pleasant Sunday evening’s amusement, m’sieur !”

Whatever the Sunday evening’s amusement promised, this particular Sunday afternoon was certainly pleasant. The Forest of Compiègne was bathed in sunshine. The white road through it northward to the town was thickly carpeted with dust ; as the column moved along its progress was absolutely silent. The wheels of the ammunition wagons might have been rubber-tyred for all the noise they made ; the rumble of the motor buses stored with supplies—seventy-eight of them I counted in one string—was muted, and the pad-pad-pad of the infantry as they marched along behind was so soft as to give one the impression that they were wearing carpet slippers. There was no haste, no flurry. There never is in these quiet, deliberate chess-moves of the army off to business. It was all timed to the hour—to the minute. When luncheon-time came, later than usual, because a damaged bridge a couple of

miles behind us had delayed the cutlets and the Camembert, we picnicked lazily enough under the shade of the trees, merry as bean-feasters ; and afterwards wandering about off the main track came across some of the trenches of the Prussian snipers, and a dead Uhlan lying in a gulley—head down and heels up, just as if he had dived in and stuck there. Over him stood a sign-post bearing the legend :

*Forest of Compiègne*

SHOOTING RIGHTS STRICTLY PRESERVED

We hoisted our kit on our shoulders again, and moved on. The Turcos, marching easily in fours and each carrying about a hundredweight of kit of every conceivable kind, were spoiling for a fight and ready for anything ; and the joyful news that there was business for them ahead set them softly chanting weird and blood-curdling battle music as they swung through the forest.

Several hundreds of them had already come off victorious—so one of their officers told me—in a wild dash on the unsuspecting Germans through the Forest of Ermenonville.

It was a taxicab fight, and the Turcos were whirled into it in scores of the familiar red taxis commandeered from Paris.

We had not proceeded far in the forest when the column I was accompanying received a



sudden order to halt. There had been a swift change of plans, and an order to turn westward once more. What did this mean? The French Army stood still in the dust, along a mile and a half of curving road, and scratched its head.

“Evidently,” said my friendly captain, “the enemy has had news of our coming, and has either fled or is fleeing from Compiègne by this time. Our orders are clear: to march westward and to leave the town alone. The Prussians have been in possession of the place for three weeks now; the good Lord alone knows what they have done there.”

“I’ll go and see,” said I.

“It will be interesting,” admitted the officer. “I wish you a pleasant trip. It will also be exciting. The snipers ——” He laughed significantly.

I said I would set off immediately—if I could. Time was precious, and it was necessary to get back to Paris before night.

“There is nothing to prevent you, m’sieur!”

“Pardon me,” said I, “but indeed there is! Across the way there, you see the signpost pointing to Compiègne. Between the signpost and myself there stands a very considerable portion of the third division of the Army of France.”

“A thousand apologies, m’sieur. It shall be moved immediately . . .!”

And moved immediately it was—opened out, shoved forward, and squeezed back at the very point where the long arrow-head on the signpost pointed “À Compiègne,” so that I could pilot my car through, run to the beleaguered town, and dash back to Paris in time for dinner.

It was charming of my friendly captain. He hadn't the slightest idea who I was—except that I was English, a friend, and a brother. But cheerfully and with great address he upset the army for me; and as I swung by, trying desperately hard to keep a grave face, two thousand soldiers of France saluted me, to the man. . . . The Turcos grinned.

The direct forest road to Compiègne speedily proved too hot to be pleasant.

“Ping!”—a bullet sang over my head, struck a tree at the side of the road and ricocheted high, with a wail to it like the complaint of a seabird tossing in the wind. “Ping!”—another, and another. Bad, wild shooting; but best to be out of it anyway; so we took a wide detour, leaving the sneaking little trenches of the Prussian snipers far behind.

In the village of Penchard, the most dreadfully desolate place I have ever seen, with every house burnt out and even the pigstyes smashed, dead dogs lying swollen and ghastly in the roadway, and graves of soldiers in the kitchen

gardens—there could be no mistaking these little mounds with here and there a rough wooden cross over them—we all but collided with piled wreckage of a previous collision. Two heavy motor-vans lay here, overturned, with their wheels sticking up in the air. Do the motor lorries engage in single combat in this amazing war? Evidently, for here was proof of the encounter. One was a square, German van, painted slate-coloured, every inch of it. The other was British, whisked over to France, no doubt in too much of a hurry to allow time to transform it. It was bright crimson still, and on the side of it I read, in letters of gold, the alluring legend :

#### CROYDON CREAMERY COMPANY

and underneath this a notice in smaller lettering calling public attention to the fact that the Croydon Creamery Company possesses a reputation unrivalled for its cakes, its icing, and its confectionery.

Here, too, by the strangest of strange chance, I met Mr. Geoffrey Young, my colleague of the *Daily News*. Polite and urbane as he always is, and ready to assist anybody in distress, Mr. Young was on his knees in the back garden of a ruined house raking among the cinders for some small treasure a poor widow had lost. The old lady was on her knees too, by the side

of my friend. The two made a picture to be remembered, I assure you !

Alas ! the treasure was never found.

We joined forces and drove together to Compiègne. On the outskirts of the town we met people running. The Germans, they told us, had left only two hours ago in hot haste, blowing up the bridge over the Oise as they left. In the town the streets were aswarm with the population—mostly women, dressed in deep black.

We drove into the square, where stands the famous statue of la Pucelle ; the people swarmed round us, the old men shouting and waving their hats, the women crying with the joy of their relief.

We were English—we were embraced and made much of—hugged, kissed, and danced round.

“ O ! what news, messieurs, what news ? How goes the war ? We are dying for news,” they cried. “ For many days we have been the slaves, the serfs, of the Germans. We have fed them and housed them ; we have given them the best of everything. True, they have not ravished our town ; our beautiful château still stands as it did, and there has been no burning, but they have taken all our wine—every cellar has been rifled ; every cigarette has been taken ; every ounce of chocolate,



We have had to make them sweetmeat until all the sugar has been exhausted ; we have had to wait upon them hand and foot ; it has been terrible. We thought we should have to be their servants onward for always—until two hours ago. Then suddenly and most speedily they left us. They crossed the river in great haste and were gone. We could scarcely believe our eyes as they vanished. This must mean good news. Does it, m'sieurs—does it ? ”

We assured them that it did ; we told them of the general retreat, and they were so glad that they sang songs of triumph in the market square around the listening statue of the Maid of Orleans.

And as the beams of the westering sun fell kindly upon her warlike face, the Maid seemed to smile. . . .

Homeward by another route we ran once more into the wake of the whirlwind—into the valley and over the hill of death. The beautiful country was strewn with the most ghastly relics of the fray. Up one hill I ran into all that remained of a German battery—an awful heap of dead men and dead, dismembered, and disembowelled horses, baskets packed with live shells. British cavalry of the second division of our First Army had dashed in among them from behind the screen of trees a biscuit-throw

away and had cut most of them literally to ribbons. At this very moment, in the cabbage field beyond, a squad of peasants were digging their graves, toppling them in like so many turnips in a pit, and shovelling the slack earth over them.

A little further along more dead horses lay by the score. Peasants were covering them with rye-straw, pouring oil on them, and setting fire to them. The smell of roasting flesh was abominable; and coming, as I did, suddenly upon it, I was violently sick. But in time I became "salted" to this terrible business. Indeed, dead men and dead horses became as common as ordinary roadside objects.

Here and there among them—actually among them!—a tired-out French soldier lay asleep as peacefully and as dreamlessly as though he were at home in his own bed. It was hard to tell—until you actually touched them—the living from the dead. . . .

Further on still, towards Torcy, a bridge over the canal had been blown up—another burning of our boats. Five and thirty blue-bloused Frenchmen were working desperately at the wreckage so as to patch it up in time for the reinforcements, the hounds and the huntsmen, which were already hurrying up. They were staggering along the road carrying on their shoulders scaffold poles, trunks of trees hastily

stripped of their garniture, baulks of timber, and roughly hewn broad planks.

“ Help us, messieurs,” they cried, so my chauffeur and I stripped our coats off and sweated gladly with the others. We flung this post-haste bridge into some sort of holding shape—but very tottery—just as a fleet of automobiles dashed along the narrow road with artillery officers on board. Behind them came a dust-bespattered ammunition column—dozens of huge motor-buses packed with munitions of war, vehicles of “ rubber-neck ” excursion parties, some of them, and still splashed with advertisements of trips from Paris.

We got them across the bridge somehow, but the very last of the lumbering rearguard smashed up our hasty patchwork, and it all had to be done over again.

## CHAPTER XIX

### AN ARMY CORPS OF SEXTONS

#### *From my Diary*

EVERY evening now the mists steal up earlier. The nights are longer, and the great moon which served as a lantern for the furious night battles has now dwindled to no more than a flicker in the sky. The nights are longer in the woods beyond Senlis. "The better for us," say the péasants—"and the better for the dead. It gives us more time for our work of burying. . . ."

So they march out, these old men, hump-shouldered, rheumy-eyed, with their shovels, their picks, and their mattocks on their shoulders to do the bidding of their new masters, who promise them good food and good pay if they only do their business speedily and cleanly. They are a new corps of the French Army—the Corps of the Sextons, and there is no age limit to their term of service when they enrol.

When the curtain of night has fallen they go out from the villages and the farmsteads, an uncanny, silent procession, to set about their business among the shattered dead. Their way is illumined by horn lanterns and torches ;



their shadows dance ghoulish-like in the flicker of the beams. Little old men, most of them, and bent double, but their shadows amid the trees are the shadows of giants. . . .

. . . . .

### THE WILLOW WAND CROSSES

Their women follow behind bearing little bundles of peeled willow wands and strands of wire. They cut a few inches from each wand and bind it on crosswise with the wire. And whenever an officer is found cold and stiff amid the huddle of the dead a cross of willow wand is planted over his grave. Hour after hour, night after night, the Corps of the Sextons, with their women cross-bearers, ply their harrowing trade, weary and wan, marking cemetery after cemetery. . . . Their bundles of sticks diminish as this acreage of the dead swells. It is not God's acre ; it is the Devil's !

The dismal night glooms on, the tallow candles in the horn lanterns flicker feebly—flicker and go out. The dawn stalks up out of the East, not softly, as these September dawns should arrive to set the fairies dancing back across the glades to their daytime hiding places—not softly, but with a jagged frown wrinkling Heaven's brow, and the thud of guns far away marking the passage of the morning hours.

Then come the piled rain clouds careering

overhead at the command of a relentless south-west wind. Heaven above is sobbing, sobbing. . . . Now she is pouring her tears in drenching streams over the graves. The shallow trenches, packed with dead men, become quagmires, and down every little hill the water streams and bubbles. It is brown water, tinged with streaks of red. . . . Blood and tears.

. . . . .

#### IN THE CHAMPAGNE COUNTRY

The shock of battle has not passed here, but devastation and pillage have left their sordid trade-mark. The vines have been mowed down to make way for the relentless armies. Millions of bunches of rich grapes lie smashed and bleeding everywhere. The wine towns have been raided, cellars stormed, and rich vintages looted by the Prussian hordes, mad with thirst. Here and there are signs of fierce revelry, of wild drunkenness. Here, no doubt, among this astonishing litter of broken bottles, is to be found the secret of blazing towns and villages, of desecrated churches, of ravished women. . . .

The German soldier, sober and at war, is a terrifying force to reckon with. The German soldier, drunk and at war, commits deeds unnameable. The tales the women have told me in this region—told me with a frankness that you at home would not believe to be possible—

have made me shudder, though I have just come through scenes of death and horror more than enough to sear the soul of any man. And the tales are true enough : an hour among these piteous martyrs in black, listening to their torrent flow of narrative, stamps them with certain truth—of that I am as sure as I am that there is still a sun to shine above this scarred, dismantled, desolate region of France—*La Belle France!*

. . . . .

#### BACK IN PARIS

After thirteen nightmare days, I pass once more by the sentinels through the gates of Paris as the sun goes down and the flashing eye of the searchlight on the Eiffel Tower begins again her roving commission amid the clouds. I find calm in the city and a reassuring flicker here and there of the old gay spirit. There are jests in the newspapers. Hey! The Parisian journalist who skipped like a scared rabbit with a ferret at his tail a few weeks back has now returned to the scenes of his past triumphs. He wears a clean collar and a new butterfly bow. He finds his old table at the café, calls for a bock, and pens, ink, and paper. . . .

Mademoiselle Butterfly is out again. Her high heels click saucily along the wide pavement of her beloved boulevard. There is a

fresh streak of crimson on her lip. Cupid has bent his bow once more. . . .

. . . . .

### IN LONDON AGAIN

Back to town is now no longer a world's-end journey, but a matter of a few hours. I find the club just as it was—most of the old faces—a hearty welcome—the same old stodgy food, and just the same placid philosopher chewing the end of his big cigar.

“Hullo—back?” says he.

“Yes,” I reply. “Back for a change of clothes and a breath of fresh air, and then off again to-morrow morning.”

“Well,” says he, “there’s just time for a rubber of bridge between the battles. Will you make one? . . .”

. . . . .

### FOLKESTONE HARBOUR (*Monday*)

I have been writing up my diary in the train. I meet a friend at the gangway, and as he is going back to town, I tear the pages out and ask him to drop in at Fleet Street if he has time. . . . What will this new week bring forth, I wonder? I am out roving again. The wanderlust of war is uncontrollable when once the fever is caught.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE WHIRLWIND

CRASH upon crash of thunder. Blue lightning leaping with vicious spurts out of masses of violent cloud. Drowning rain in torrents hissing down, blinding, drenching and cutting the skin like knives. Mud thick and binding—ankle deep, knee deep, axle deep ; every road a quag and every lane a morass ! And a new army—the Army of the West—marching into it for the honour and glory of France—fresh men, fresh horses, fresh guns ; the men eager, the horses well fed and fit, the guns crouching and ready for the snarl, under their careful covering of canvas and tarpaulin.

Thus, on Sunday, September 20, began this memorable week and the fiftieth day of the war. Could any but fiends fight in such an elemental upheaval ? It seemed incredible. The floods were out ; small streams which were little more than a trickle a few days back were now roaring torrents. The Aisne was hurtling along, foam-flecked fury of a river, carrying its livid cargo of corpses to the sea. The thunder, as the clouds whirled overhead, did not growl or grumble. It was thunder gone

mad. Every shot of it exploded with a frightful clang right overhead at the tail of the leaping flashes of blue flame. And under this deafening Olympic tumult the game of war was still being played, swiftly, craftily—every move full of momentous things.

By some strange luck I was in the very middle of it. I had worked no problem out ; there was no time for that ; but some sort of eerie instinct had carried me along and dropped me amazed and frightened—I tell you truly I was frightened at the immensity of it all—into the very heart of the movement of the Western Army.

Already the Prussian hordes were sullenly, savagely retreating, step by step, and fighting like wolves every inch of the way along the extreme left of the Allies' line. In the roaring storm, or series of storms—for there seemed to be no end to them or to their fury—a mighty plan was laid, hatched and fledged in a few short hours. From the east, the army of Lorraine, or most of it, was hurried round southward, reinforced heavily on the way and rushed on to the Western line to bring off that great coup desired by all generals in all wars—an enveloping movement. This, or most of it, was accomplished under the concealing curtain of thunderclouds, with the vivid lightning as a torch to show the way and the hissing rain to screen the army's march. And it would have

been over and done with long before this, had not the enemy conceived the self-same plan and hurried their men and their guns, their supplies, their aeroplanes, their cooks and bottle-washers across the whirlwind from the left of their line to the right! The brain which moves the Prussian Juggernaut is quick and keen and crafty. It does not miss much.

It was a race in the rain. Who would get there first? Little news of the exciting scramble could be obtained by either side, for in such a drench of weather no aeroplanes could live for five minutes. So it all resolved itself into a pretty puzzle—Blindman's buff of war!

The German right wing flung itself into the difficult country north-west of Noyon, slapping its mud-encumbered legions into the quarries with which this rugged terrain abounds, planting its guns over the ridges commanding river and railway, entrenching in the scattered woods, and sending its flying squadrons, with their light-weight cavalymen on their lissom horses, scudding through the villages and darting among the trees, careless of capture and doing the most daring of things.

Behind were the massed troops—some of the flower of the German army—grinding, grinding along in numbers seemingly incredible. They are still playing the "steam-roller" game, these fair-haired Teutons, lashed on to death and

glory, their eyes turned southward, with the Iron Cross their guiding star and their courage amazing as it ever was.

They are fighting splendidly. There is no doubt, if there are Huns and pillagers and ravishers among them, there are also fine soldiers, brilliant generalship and courage unbounded. Courage is now matched with courage, generalship with generalship, and the balance is swinging now on one side and now on the other. . . .

The roaring of guns is still throbbing in my head as I write this—a prisoner of war immured in a machinery shop—with a gendarme smiling complacently at me as he sits on the hard smooth table of a steam lathe, swinging his red legs. I will tell more of my adventures in this curious position later. But now—as far as I am able and to what extent I am permitted—I will deal with the fighting and what I saw and heard of it before the fortunes of war swooped down upon me and led me, manacled and blindfold, out of the tumult.

In the early hours of this exciting week I found myself a shivering victim of a million scorpions of rain at A——, amid all the moving incidents of an army on the march—a muddy, drenched army, 'tis true, with the infantry slogging along hump-shouldered and blinking in the drench like a vast horde of drowned rats. And here, too, to my infinite surprise, was



General —, the politest, the most gentlemanly, the kindest soldier one could ever wish to meet. Here was he with his staff around him, his kind, quick eyes taking in every detail of men and horses, guns and gear, food and hospital equipment, and all the rest of it, and never missing a scrap. The way in which the men greeted him as he swished by in his huge mud-splashed motor showed how he is loved—is worshipped. How he came here from afar, and why? Some magic—a magic as mobile as those thrilling carpet journeys in the Arabian Nights—may perhaps account for it. From where he lay, waiting patiently in a far-away area of the battle-line, the call came to other territory—a swift, urgent call; and so he is here. . . . And we will say no more about it except that you may be sure he was wanted pretty urgently in the great business afoot.

The general cast his eye upon the damp, moving multitude of blue and red and nodded as they passed. His smile was encouraging; his words few, but sweet and satisfying to the soldiers as they faced the tearing rain and splashed onward. Heaven might frown upon them and batter them with her fierce tempests. What mattered this to them so long as their general smiled? Somewhere behind those growling clouds the star of France was shining. . .

In this manner, then, the Army of the West lolloped along in an easy half-circle to the Aisne, still being battered by the rain, thunderstorm after thunderstorm growling and howling over them, stopping (with cruel persistency) where they stopped, moving when they moved, still pouring its vials upon them. The Chasseurs à pied on their light little bicycles, wooden rimmed and tyred with red rubber, rode on ahead to see that the way was clear, for in these torrents no aerial scouting was possible !

The way was clear—fairly clear at all events—until, amid the scattered woodlands in the region of the Fôret de X——, the Bicyclette Chasseurs came upon a number of German scouts at the same game, rode them down through sheer hard pedalling, and collared half of them too breathless to fight. Some miles to the west of the woods, in the small town of X——, situated conveniently on the banks of a flooded tributary of the Oise, the General Staff established their new headquarters. A very large factory was commandeered, and here the agile brain of the Western Army, having silenced the whirl of wheels, settled down to the big problem before it. By Tuesday morning the rain cleared, a blustering south-wester sprang up ; the sun came out again in summer splendour, the long level roads dried up with extraordinary quickness, and life was worth

living again even to the tired, bedraggled soldier.

At X—— we unshrouded our precious aeroplanes, spread their yellow wings, and made the snuggest of snug camps for them in a delightful clearing in the most fairy-like scenery it was ever my joy to see. Fifteen kilometres away the Prussian eagles, though we were unaware of it at the moment, were also drying their wings and preening their feathers. Five or six miles to the west the heavy boom of our own guns came clearly to our ears. Boom for boom the German artillery replied, somewhat fainter because farther away. Minute after minute the cannonading went on. Kilometer by kilometer our advancing army strolled along, still at the same jog-step.

In the wide factory-yard French soldiers, stripped to the waist, cleaned up the grimy cars of our general and his staff, and polished up all the brass work spick and span. The general lunched on freshly-caught pheasant (in spite of the fact that he is a thorough sportsman, and that it was not yet October), and sped off through the little town to make closer acquaintance with the thunder we could hear growling on ahead. And then, up into the dazzling blue went the aeroplanes until their waspish hum was no longer audible and their wings no bigger to the eyes than the wings of dragonflies. We were

ourselves again ; our men were dry, our horses dry, and our eagles dry and hastening up into the eye of the sun. . . .

A couple of minutes later, over to the northward where the white smoke of the big guns rolled up over the hill, hung for a moment poised in the still air like balloons, and then filmed away into nothingness—a couple of minutes later, a Taube aeroplane darted toward us like a swallow on the wing. Our own little Bleriot, spotting the danger, whirled upward in swift circles until it was high over the Taube. Then it swooped downward again, the Taube swerved, banking dizzily, and I heard high in the air an exchange of shots with no more noise in them than the sound of a Crystal Palace rocket discharging its golden stars on a summer's night. The Taube turned and fled. Our bird chased it hard, until hawk and quarry disappeared from view. It was a thrilling picture, this aerial duel. Very pretty, too !

The loveliness of the morning was supreme ; hours for the fairies to dance in. But death was screaming and writhing only a mile or two away. We were already taking it as a matter of course. Death is our daily business just now. We are fighting day after day from sunrise to moontime. We fell asleep beside our red-hot guns : they come and drag us out of the way



by our feet as though we were dead men, they take our places, wait awhile for the night mist to cool the hot steel, and then get on with it again, shattering dreamtime to Hades.

## CHAPTER XXI

### AROUND LASSIGNY

How many days this hot battle of the West had been waging I have only a hazy idea. On Sunday and Monday both armies were entrenched in morass and quag, and finding cover as best they could both from the shrapnel of the guns and the shrapnel of the skies. In the neighbourhood of Lassigny, a village on the high road between Mondidier and Noyon, the fiercest struggle raged.

Lassigny is—or was, until the demon of war came along and made it hideous—a delightful little place in the heart of the cider country. It lies in a dip and hills command it to the north and the south. During the wild week-end weather of September 19, 20 and 21 the Germans came and nested there, building themselves in snugly against the weather. They found great quantities of cider and cheese which the scared population had left behind—and they had a rare time, feeling fairly safe under the cover of their guns on the northern hill. The inhabitants had fled panic-stricken with what goods and chattels they could carry with them, southward behind the guardian lines of the French army.

Other villages all around were also cleared and held either by the French or the Germans, but Lassigny, for some reason or other which I cannot understand, seemed to be the place most cherished and most desired. In the night the French suddenly opened a withering fire on the place, and racing down the hill under cover of the screaming shells took the enemy by surprise. The Teutons had been gorging and drinking heavily—tankard upon tankard of cider, litre upon litre of red wine, that red wine the Prussian cherishes with a love surpassing the love of woman. Many of them were drunk, few fit for fighting in the dark and in the rain, and all chary of the long slim French bayonet—"La Rosalie" it is called—which has done such deadly work in this war. There was hand-to-hand fighting in the village street, fierce and terrible; but not for long. The Germans were tumbled back, heels over head, to their own hill, and glad enough they were to find shelter there once more.

Next morning the tables were turned. The German guns swept the wood and blighted the little village. A cavalry charge tore down the hill and the French were routed. In the evening there was another charge from the south, more bloody business with "La Rosalie," another occupation by the French. And so this ding-dong business went on, with the sportive

spirits of the contending armies on either hill betting on the result of the next tussle !

The village was a shambles, the street was piled with dead and dying, and when I tell you that in two days 800 French wounded were brought out of the place for treatment in the field hospitals and elsewhere, that prisoners were taken and retaken wholesale hour by hour on both sides, as the bloody battle hammered grimly on in sunshine and in starlight, rain and thunder-clap, you may have some idea of the carnage in this place. How the fighting was kept in the wild weather, hour after hour, day after day, is astonishing—amazing. There is a limit to human endurance, but endurance in this war seems superhuman. They were hardly men that were fighting here ; they were mud-larks—apparitions most woeful to behold. The contest on this line between the village and the next was closer and more hand-to-hand than it has been anywhere in the whole range of operations. The troops were near enough to shout taunts and sarcasms to one another during the lulls of cannon practice.

Mud everywhere was so thick and binding that it was well nigh impossible to get the heavy munitions of war along or to make mobile use of the artillery.

But the cyclists on both sides slipped out between the showers and the rapier play of the



lightning, and had sharp encounters among themselves; and one of the French officers—a light cavalryman whose deeds of horsemanship are well-known and remembered at Olympia—told me that when he was scouting he had witnessed several man-to-man bouts with bayonet and sword and clubbed rifle which reminded him of incidents in the Iliad.

One French infantryman, who had lost his kit and his company, was plugging along in the dreary weather in search of his comrades when he came upon a young German soldier, similarly lost but very much better equipped. He was sitting on a fallen log by the roadside, this young German, eating a full meal from his bulging knapsack—a beautiful bran-new knapsack of red cowhide. The Frenchman coveted this knapsack above all things. So he rushed for the German and bowled him over in the mud. They fought on the ground with fists, these two, literally a tooth-and-nail encounter. In the end the Frenchman won and claimed the German as his prisoner, but let him go on the condition of the rich ransom of his cowhide kit and its contents. In the knapsack, in addition to the ordinary necessities of a soldier, were many strange things, some of which very much surprised the simple French Tommy into whose hands this precious loot had fallen. They included a brand new set of safety shaving

appliances, a small, silver-rimmed mirror, a scent-spray, a manicure set, and a natty little pocket brush and comb. The Frenchman, though simple, was polite, as all French soldiers. He bowed to his beaten enemy.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, “I must apologize for my treatment of you. I was not aware that I was fighting a lady!”

In the skirmishing among the hills around the “Courts”—Thiescourt, Evrecourt, Carnectaucourt and Elincourt—the French light cavalry put in some very pretty work. The German raiding horsemen were no good against these reckless, slim, young devil-may-cares: whenever they saw them coming they turned and fled, and in the scampering race which followed the Frenchmen generally won and came prancing proudly back to headquarters behind Lassigny—each with a prisoner and a horse in hand. As the clouds were clearing and some hope of better weather dawned the French rode full tilt into one end of Elincourt as the Germans fled from it at the other end, leaving behind them a whole colony of wounded.

Progress was now distinct and gratifying. The left of the Allies were slamming along and the enemy were backing, sullenly and slowly, and fighting with slogging vigour every inch of the way. For many hours the Germans held

the useful little line of railway running eastward toward Noyon. What railway stock they had managed to bag they made the best possible use of, but from a hill to the south the French artillery had got the range well marked. In their retreat the Germans packed long lines of trucks with stores, guns and men, and began the exciting game of running the gauntlet, in order to hurry their troops back amid the rough country of the quarries where a staunch stand had been planned. They managed to get two or three trains away before the other side tumbled to their game. Then the shells began to fall, plug-plug-plug, along the line. One engine was smashed and its complement broken up before this reckless attempt at speedy transport was abandoned.

Slowly, steadily the battle mass moved eastward—good indeed for us, but bitter gruel for the Germans, who, in spite of reinforcements of great strength, were shoved back by main force. In the stone quarries north of Attichy they found, for the time, safe harbourage in natural fortresses, which they protected as best they could from rain by doors torn from houses and farm barns in the surrounding villages. Hundreds of doors were used in this manner. They were converted into roofs “thatched” with turf and heather and the leaves of forest undergrowth; and under them the German infantry

crouched and let fly at anything and everything.

Quarry for quarry! Along came the hounding Army of the West, intent on the same strategy, stowed away their guns amid the crevasses and the jagged precipices on the hillside facing the enemy, and there at close range Greek and Trojan blazed away at one another with the object more of demoralization than death.

Hammer, hammer—roar, roar, they went at it—the wildest blasting these dumb and stricken quarries had ever had. Which side would wear the other down first? That was the problem. Who could stand this demoniac clamour of incessant gun-fire the longest? Weary and worn, with blood-shot eyes, tattered garments and senses numbed beyond the natural understanding of things, these men—humans no longer, but mere machines working grimly on at the bidding of the master-hand moving behind all this tumult—kept on in a gloomy nightmare, playing the incredible game of war as it has to be played in these tearing, terrible days.

There was not so much death in this clanging torrent of shellfire, as demoralization. Noise and fury was the object of both sides. Time and again men crawled out of the trenches shaken out of all semblance of humanity. They were gibbering lunatics some of them; like Falstaff on his death-bed, “babbling o’ green



fields"—deaf as adders ; a wild, terrible look in their eyes, their hands trembling, their feet dragging as they walked like the feet of men paralysed ; their faces grey, their hair bleached.

And the wounded—the wounded who could not walk crawled to as near safety as they could get ; crawled groaning, screaming, cursing, leaving little smears of blood behind them. I have many a time seen a shot rabbit creeping home to its warren with a shattered leg dragging behind it—creeping, creeping and squealing. So these men crept and squealed until the bearers came along and eased them of their agony.

Processions of the dead moved southward all day long—often as not two men carrying one by the heels and the shoulders. Others were borne out of the line upon hurdles and doors ; and now and again a priest with head bent and finger marking the passage in the closed breviary he had just been reading, would head the procession.

Ah, these village priests, these men of God in the firing line ! What dreadful things they have seen ; what horrors have moved before their quiet eyes ! What poignant ministrations have been their lot ; how splendidly they have done their duty ! Day and night they labour—for the wounded, for the dying, for the dead. They seem to be moving and living in a dream.

There is a puzzled look in their eyes. The world is upside down. Is God still in His heaven ?

All along the Germans have been boasting of the demoralizing effect of their gun-fire ; they have been building upon it ; but one by one their castles are toppling about their ears. They find that the Frenchman, fighting for the glory of his country, possesses a spirit that is unquenchable, a heart so high that it cannot be hammered into submission by all the sound and fury that ever came out of the steel cradle of Krupp.

And so up to the end of this wild, whirling week all was going well with the gallant Western Army. There was still great clamour and smashing and roaring amid the quarries ; still hand-to-hand fighting through the desolate village streets, with their doorless houses staring amazed at the tumult that raged by, their inhabitants fled long since and the very cattle and fowls gone. Passing through these places I have been saddened to tears, though God knows I have seen enough of horrors in these last few nightmare weeks to make the heart of any man a heart of stone, to dry the fountain of his eyes for ever. Desolation is so absolute. The flaming armies have passed through like a whirlwind. Smoke and ashes remain to tell the

tale. Every clock in public and private places has stopped at various hours of the day or night. Time is standing still, holding her breath. . . .

But now that the sun is shining again and the clouds have gone, brighter hopes rise fresh with every dawning day. General —, as he rides out of his commandeered factory every morning to see how the battle goes, carries with him an air of high confidence. His strong, smiling face gives great heart to the troops as he swings by in his great car. . . . Another week of the war is beginning, and for us it is beginning well, as I turn from the tumult and ride away out of it all.

In a few hours I am back again, in twilight time, at Beauvais. It is a wonderful evening of red sunset. Slowly the glow dies away, lights twinkle in the town, the little stars come out one by one, and from the tall ghostly tower of the grand old cathedral the evening bell rings out softly, sweetly, "in this calm twilight of grey Gothic things."

## CHAPTER XXII

### A PRISONER OF WAR

THE great enveloping movement of the Western Army—the swing of the door with the shell-torn village of Lassigny for the hinge of it—seemed likely to go on interminably. When I left the area of operations toward the end of the week Lassigny had already been taken and retaken about a dozen times, in daytime and in nighttime, under the scream of shell, the drench of shrapnel, at the point of the bayonet. The hinge was clogged and stiffened with blood; both armies were shoving like mad at the door in their attempts to slam it. Here, indeed, was the tail-end of the biggest battle that has ever been fought in the world's history. Von Kluck was crowing no longer, but he was still digging his sharp claws in among the quarries, refusing to budge, though the dead piled around him crest-high.

Beauvais' calm afforded time for reflection: only the faintest echo of the tremendous conflict reached this quiet town. My colleague and I (if it is not safer, it is more companionable to travel in pairs in these thrilling times) held a long consultation de guerre as we sat in the



# HOTEL DU CHEMIN DE FER

RESTAURANT

TÉLÉPHONE  
23

*Berthon-Dubuisson*

En face la Gare

CLERMONT (Oise)

Chambre N° 3

11 Sept<sup>re</sup>

1914

5.	Diners a. L'	20.	
2.	b. P <sup>r</sup> Emilien <sup>24</sup>	8.	
5.	Café à 0,60.	3.	11.
1.	chambre	6.	
1.	chambre	4.	
2.	chambres	6.	
3.	caf. au lait a, 0,75	2.	25
1.	l. déjeuner	1.	
		30.	35

MY HOTEL BILL AT CLERMONT (see page 165)

To face page 156



sweet morning sunshine on the steps of Beauvais Cathedral, mapped out our plans, and set forth through the slumbrous old city to search for an automobile to carry us back to the battle-zone. It was a heart-breaking business.

We walked miles over the hard cobbles, and at last found the only auto left in the place. It belonged to the local undertaker, and it was hidden away behind a great, gloomy hearse curtained with all manner of purple trappings of woe. This was not exactly a cheerful beginning: it was ominous, to say the least of it. But we got it, and we got it with the gallantest driver who ever opened throttle—a handsome Spaniard, Maurice his name. His badge, like the car he drove, also threatened disaster. It was No. 13, set in a gold circle dangling from his watch chain.

But we had good luck to start with. To our amazement, the military commandant at the Hôtel de Ville was charming and most anxious to oblige. He gave us the coveted pass to take us through amongst the woods and the cider plantations on toward X——, and off we set, spanking along merrily in the sunshine. Peace lay like a benediction everywhere: not a whisper of war was to be heard. The birds were singing.

“We must have taken the wrong road,” said I, and at that very moment we swung round a

corner of the glade, and ran slap into the middle of it all—the silent army moving along grimly, passionlessly, to battle; and overhead, at a height almost invisible, that inevitable, keen-eyed hawk of war, the aeroplane. And a little later as we crested the hill the familiar sound as of the beating of carpets, the banging of heavy muffled doors. . . .

Ahead was another hill with a castellated little town, ramparted and smoking serenely in the morning shine; the road clear and smooth—

“Ha!” cried Maurice, and he opened the motor out. We were flying along. Suddenly a soldier leapt out into the road ahead, brandishing a bayonet, and dancing demon-wise in the dust. Then another, and another.

“Doucement, doucement, Maurice!” I yelled as I ducked; and Maurice obeyed, just in time. The first gentleman with the bayonet sprang upon our car. I showed him the pass of the military commandant, and told him where we wished to go.

“Anglais!” cried the surprised sentry with a cheerful grin, and shook us warmly by the hands. “This way! This way!” He piloted us into the town, pointing the way with the bright steel of *la Rosalie*; and we drove, with sublime, sweet innocence, slap into the jaws of—well, it might have been—Death. It was a huge factory, and as we entered the courtyard



of it a splendid cavalcade of chasseurs rode gallantly out.

We waited for them to pass, and then moved on at funeral speed to the centre of the square, where stood the great General — with his staff around him, all very fine in their smart, picturesque uniforms, and looking more like stage soldiers than the real thing—the very real thing—they actually were.

To say that they were surprised to see us : to say that we were surprised to see them, would be a very mild way of putting it. We were mutually amazed. But before courtesies—even the rapid courtesies of war—could be passed, we were whisked away, the three of us, by a super-polite captain of the gendarmerie, ushered into the works, searched, our papers taken away from us, and ourselves stuck in a chill corner of the lathe-shop, with strict injunctions that we were not to look out of the window, even should the heavens fall. The automobile from the undertaker's shop at Beauvais was shunted away into some obscure siding with all our traps and baggage ; as it vanished round the corner Maurice wrung his hands. He never expected to see it again. Nor did we.

Our polite captain vanished, and for hours and hours we stayed there, kicking our fretful heels, and wondering what was going to happen to us.

From the stores we had packed into our confiscated auto I had managed to rescue a Camembert cheese, which I slipped into the pocket of my overcoat. My colleague, who scorns such trifles, had nothing. Anon, the captain returned with the glad news that the general would allow us, under bayonet escort, to march down to the village inn to dine.

"I wish you a pleasant meal, gentlemen," said he; and as he bowed over my hand he sniffed, looked around him and about, and sniffed again. . . .

We marched down the village street in the glow of the evening sun, the observed of all observers, with the dread bayonets of our guard twinkling at our ears. We called for the finest banquet the house could provide—and we had it, with the two sentries as our guests. They expanded delightfully as course followed course, and when at last the black coffee and the soul-stirring cognac came along they were our sworn friends for ever and ever. They didn't say much, but they chuckled continuously. Chuckling still, they marched us back to our fell prison.

We were looking forward gloomily to a comfortless night's roosting among the lathes, when another message came from the kind general—"Gentlemen, you will be allowed to sleep at the inn, under guard. Further, you will be

permitted to take with you your sleeping gear ! Also, your tooth-brushes ! ”

Was there ever such a sight for laughing France ? Two mournful prisoners being marched to bed with a sentry on each side of him, a bayonet in one brown hand and a pair of fluttering pyjamas in the other. My colleague's sleeping suit was a confection of vivid blue, with white spots. . . . The whole townlet chortled as we passed.

Had I the mind, I could have easily escaped from my prison, for my bedroom window was low and underneath it a soft, high dunghill to break the fall. It was too easy—far too easy. I remembered the exploits of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. Besides, I was dead tired. So I blew out the candle and crept into bed, a soft, feather-bed—and me a prisoner of war, to be led out and shot, perhaps, next morning !

We slept soundly, and so perhaps did the sentries, tucked up in the narrow passage with their backs to our doors.

In the morning light back we plodded to jail ; another weary day among the lathes and the emery wheels ! The bench upon which I reclined was piled with files ; the waiting was so wearying that I longed for gyves and fetters to manacle me closer to my dungeon, Here were files enough for a round dozen of Jack Sheppards

to saw themselves free of the toughest manacles. But, files without fetters—well!

This night our dinner-party was memorably lively; indeed, now that I am away from it, I can hardly believe that what happened actually did happen, so strange it was. The birds from the Flying Camp came and messed with us—a merry, bright-eyed little crowd. First, Garros—that marvellous juggler in the clouds, who was believed to have been slain in the air in desperate conflict early in the war. He came in singing. His tumbled hair was wet with the evening dew. The ribbon of the Legion of Honour proudly stamped its presence upon his breast; his face was smudged and oily. In his hand he carried a live pheasant.

“How did you catch it,” said I, “in the air?”

“No, m’sieur—in the woods. *Le faisán en la main vaut mieux que l’oie qui vole!*” He laughed a boyish laugh.

“Madame!” he called to our hostess, “I deliver this confrère of the clouds to you. I have not the heart to wring its beautiful neck, but I much desire it for déjeuner to-morrow. Pray, will you do the business?—but out of my sight and hearing, if you love me!”

“Monsieur, it shall be done!” And done it was.

Next, a famous tenor from the Paris Opera, who charmed many Londoners by his sweet



voice when Hammerstein held his sway in the noble building in Kingsway. He sang to us most beautifully—"La Bohême," "Tosca," "Faust"—with his soldier's tunic unbuttoned at the throat, and his whole soul pulsing with melody.

The windows were rattling at the thud of the guns a few miles away. Our sweet singer sang on :

*All hail, thou dwelling pure and holy —*

Garros, who had been tinkling on the piano with one finger, swung round on his seat suddenly.

"Give us," said he to the tenor, "'The Soldiers' Chorus.'"

"No," said his friend, with a shrug. "There is no need ; the soldiers themselves are already giving us it. Come, mes amis—let us listen !"

He went to the window and flung it wide. We leaned out, English prisoners and French soldiers alike, and under a drench of starshine hearkened to the war music over the hill, speaking meanwhile to one another in whispers. . . .

And so to bed, there in our troubled dreams to hear it again.

. . . . .

I must not forget to mention that my little box of Camembert spent the night cooling on the window-sill. There I left it ; but on the

morning march back to durance, madame, our hostess, came pattering down the road after us.

“M’sieur, votre Camembert!” said she; and I slipped it back into my pocket.

We were wondering if we should ever see home and England again, when our natty captain suddenly dropped in upon us with the gladdest of glad tidings. A British staff officer was on his way to deal with our case—he was here!

“The general is sorry, messieurs, to have kept you here so long. Your case was serious, because you were caught inside the prohibited zone of battle. But as you are British—and we are brothers now (he laughed a jolly, fraternal laugh), fighting for the honour and the glory of England and France—the general said we must find, by hook or by crook, a British officer to pronounce judgment. We have searched long and we have searched far. I am happy to tell you that we have been at last successful. Messieurs, Major Thompson; Major Thompson, Messieurs ——”

It was a joy to see the grey-green khaki once more in all this wilderness of blue and red: it was even better to hear the pleasant, cultured voice, with its stern though kindly rebuke. . . .

We were free again. Our confiscated automobile, our baggage—even my dear colleague’s cerulean, starred pyjamas—were handed back.

Maurice, shedding tears, swished round his starting handle and sprang aboard. We were off! Toot—toot! We cleared the first line of friendly-faced soldiers; we swung happily through the wide gateway. . . . A cry from behind—a sentry—one of our own champion chucklers, was running, shouting, beckoning.

“Doucement, Maurice—doucement!”

We trembled. What did this new turning movement mean? Back to our dungeon again? Alas!

We stopped with jarring brakes.

The sentry ran up, puffing; bowed to me, with the dignity of an emperor, and handed me a little round packet, neatly wrapped.

“Monsieur,” said he, “votre Camembert!”

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*\* \* The hotel bill reproduced opposite page 156 is an interesting little souvenir of my imprisonment at French headquarters. It is one night's entertainment and accommodation for myself, my colleague, my chauffeur and the two sentries who were told off to guard us.*

## L'ENVOI

HERE, for a time, I leave the tumultuous theatre of war. Not for long, maybe; for when the call comes it comes with an insistence irresistible—not to be denied. As I write these last few lines, the great battle-front has spread almost to the shores of the North Sea; shells are flaming over the beautiful city of Antwerp, and friends and foes are still hammering one another relentlessly, tirelessly, among the quarries and across hill and dale in the neighbourhood of my dungeon near Lassigny. The outcome of it all is inevitable: there seems no doubt of that; but how long it will last, Heaven alone knows.

One thing is certain—certain and splendid. The courage of the Allied troops is unbounded and wonderful. Brothers in arms, brothers in adversity, brothers in triumph, they are fighting with a vigour that is inspired. And through it all, Tommy—our own beloved Tommy, brown, battered, drenched, and draggletailed, is maintaining the note of high courage he struck when the quick, silent transports flung him out upon the French coast to let him have “his little



whack " in the circus. He is still singing, high-hearted and jubilant, the same old song with the same old refrain :

*It's a long, long way to Tipperary ;  
It's a long way to go !*









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Author ..... Ashton, Harold

Title ..... First from the front.

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